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Cover image: 1919 solar eclipse taken from the report of Sir Arthur Eddington on the expedition to verify Einstein’s prediction of the bending of light around the sun

Critical Studies is an interdisciplinary journal of the humanities, dedicated to critical studies broadly construed. It is an annual, open access, peer-reviewed print and digital publication, and functions both as a traditional academic journal and as an annual report of the activity of the Critical Studies Research Group, a postgraduate community based in University of Brighton’s School of Humanities.
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On the 25th and the 26th of June, 2015, the Critical Studies Research Group at the University of Brighton hosted its fourth international conference. Discussion surrounded the tension that exists between the visible and the invisible: while accepting many fecund conceptualisations of politics as the process of making visible what is invisible, what - we wondered - might be the value of remaining, precisely, invisible, of keeping off the radar, of staying underground, for radical activism, artistic performance, and alternative politics? In posing this question, numerous others soon present themselves: Is there a danger that the potential political efficacy of remaining hidden is effaced when politics, art, history, ethics, or philosophy are judged by their ability to disrupt what is visible and sayable? How, when, and where is the making visible of the invisible precisely depoliticising or politically debilitating?

To address these issues is to throw into question an entire tradition of thought and practice, a tradition that articulates politics and aesthetics as involving a widening of the regime of the perceptible, as granting a voice to those without a voice. It is to throw into question not so much the position that claims this is what politics may well be, but rather the implicit presupposition that this is what politics is exclusively and that politics ought, as a result, to be thought with and through categories such as speech, inclusion, and visibility.

The present volume of Critical Studies continues the conversations started during those two days. It opens up questions surrounding the visibility and intelligibility of certain identities and practices; it questions the interplay between visibility and invisibility in racial and gender politics; it traces the manners in which specific aesthetic and artistic media - performance, photography, film - incorporate and put into play the tension between visibility and invisibility; and it interrogates the intimate bond between (in)visibility and violence.

The conversations will not stop here, of course. The themes touched upon in this issue continue to intrigue us and demand further interrogation, problematisation, and scrutiny.
The upcoming, third volume of Critical Studies will not focus on a specific theme. Rolling submissions are welcome and, as always, we encourage conventional as well as non-conventional forms of presentation.
Can Photographs Lie? Reflections on a Perennial Anxiety

Martin Jay

Abstract

Drawing on linguistic theories of lying from speech act theory and deconstruction, the paper explores the meaning of the inherent “truth claims” attributed to photographs, claims that have come under increased pressure with the recent digital revolution. Rejecting the simple opposition of a photograph as either documentary evidence or aesthetic construction, it also resists the distinction between the technological apparatus producing a photograph—whether analog or digital—and the institutional context of photography. Instead, it seeks to locate photographs at the crossroads of figurality and discursivity, thus allowing us to make sense of the ways in which they may indeed be said, despite their apparent muteness, to have the capacity to lie.

On Thursday, March 4, 2015, The New York Times reported an embarrassing turn of events in the field of professional photography: the revocation of the World Press Photo contest’s first prize, which had been awarded a short time earlier to the Italian photographer Giovanni Troilo. He had won for a series of ten images called “The Dark Heart of Europe” about the city of Charleroi in Belgium. The controversy over his prize focused on one photo in particular in which, to quote the Times’ article, “Mr. Troilo had photographed his cousin having sex with a woman in the back of a car, using a remote-control flash to illuminate the steamy back seat. By putting a flash in the car, critics had said, Mr. Troilo effectively staged the photo, violating the rules of the contest. The photographer disagreed.”

Troilo’s offense, in other words, had occurred prior to the taking of his photograph, violating a prohibition on staging an allegedly documentary image, which was defined as “something that would not have happened without the photographer’s involvement.” Before their rescinding the first prize, the article also noted, jurors for the World Press Photo prize had already “disqualified 20 percent of the photos that made the contest’s final rounds because they had been digitally manipulated by photographers who added or subtracted key elements of the images in post-processing, violating the rules of photographic integrity.”

In short, the jury for the prize, pressured by critics who insisted that definitions were binding and rules were meant to be followed, reaffirmed the time-honored distinction between photographs deliberately intended as artifacts or even works of art—where presumably staging, post-production manipulation, and something called “the rules of photographic integrity” would not be at issue—and photographs claiming to be accurate records of real events occurring contingently in the world, where they clearly would. Well, maybe not so clearly, as the original jury award had been premised, the Times’ article revealed, on the assumption that Troilo’s photograph “could be seen as documentary photography or portraiture, where such use of a flash is considered acceptable.” What seems to have convinced it to rethink its judgment was less the flash in the car than the caption that had accompanied the image, which read “locals know of parking lots popular for sexual liaisons.” By not

1 Rachel Donadio, “Top Award for Photo is Revoked,” The New York Times, March 5, 2015, C5.
signaling he was one of the locals in the know, the photographer had deceptively elided his complicity in what was being photographed. Troilo later protested that he had never meant the photo to be taken as showing a couple caught unawares in flagrante delicto, because he had solicited the prior cooperation of his cousin (although he neglects to mention whether or not the other party in the car was asked for hers). His aim was to “show voyeurism through voyeurism. The camera becomes active; it becomes the sense of shame.”

Whatever the precise merits of this particular case or the plausibility of Troilo’s cryptic explanation, it is worth rehearsing because it reminds us that the controversy over photographic mendacity, fueled by anxiety about what Tom Gunning calls the “truth claims” of photographs as trustworthy representations of what they record, continues to rage. And perhaps not coincidentally, it seems to be intensifying at the very same time that “photography matters as art as never before,” to cite the title of Michael Fried’s recent celebration of such contemporary photographers as Jeff Wall, Cindy Sherman, Hiroshi Sugimoto, Philip-Lorca diCorcia, Thomas Demand, Rineke Dijkstra, the Bechers, Thomas Struth, Andreas Gursky, Thomas Ruff and Candida Höfer. That is, there seems to be emerging, at least conceptually, a more categorically rigid distinction between photographs that claim to be truthful, having what we might call evidential weight and providing impersonal testimony about real events, and photographs that willingly bracket truth claims to align themselves with other more self-consciously creative image-making practices, such as painting, which normally privilege imagination and control over mimesis and serendipity.

One way to understand these sharpened categorizations is to see them as reactions to the anxieties unleashed by the digital revolution in photography that began around 1990. There has, of course, been a great deal of ink spilled—or rather pixels generated—over the implications of digitalization, in particular on the widely debated role of so-called “indexicality” in the truth claims of photographs. Without the physical trace of the light rays bouncing off objects in the world and being registered chemically on photographic film, so it was feared, iconic verisimilitude would not be enough to verify the truth claims of images. Indeed, some even talked melodramatically of the resulting “death of photography.” Whether there was a radical break between analog and digital techniques, one with ontological significance, or merely a technological enhancement of methods of doctoring images that were there ever since the first double exposure “spirit” photos of the 19th century, is, however, still being debated, if perhaps without the apocalyptic dread infusing many of the original responses to digitalization.

My own inclination, for what it is worth, is to side with those who hold that Photoshop has not really undermined our still potent faith in photography’s ability to

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4 See, for example, the essays in Martin Lister, ed., The Photographic Image in Digital Culture (New York, Routledge, 2013).
5 For a sample of the arguments for and against, see James Elkins, ed., Photography Theory (New York, Routledge, 2007).
represent the world with fidelity, even if we are a smidgeon less confident that it is always being scrupulously maintained. Airbrushing, after all, long antedated what is now called the “rasterization” of pixels on our computers. Significantly, as many observers have noted, we do not ban digital images from our passports or drivers licenses, but consider them trustworthy, if not always very flattering, portraits of their holders, capable of identifying them with just as much accuracy as analog images or even indexical fingerprints. When we hold them up to the immigration officer or highway patrolman, he or she still can recognize us in the face on the page. Whatever the technological changes may imply, the institutional support for believing in photographic veracity remains pretty much in place. Moreover, as W.J.T. Mitchell has pointed out in his discussion of the Abu Ghraib torture photographs, digital images carry with them invisible metadata, which allows the expert to know the precise date and time the picture was taken and with which camera.6 This information provides evidence within the image—or more precisely, the image file—that is normally archived outside it, if at all, and thus potentially increases our confidence in its veracity or in our ability to detect lies told about it.7

From the very beginning of the medium’s invention, such confidence has, to be sure, always drawn on a certain suspension of disbelief. The world, after all, doesn’t appear to our sense of sight in two dimensions or in geometric frames, say three inches by five, or in black and white rather than color, or frozen in time rather than almost always in motion. Nor does it depend on a supporting medium such as photographic paper or a computer screen, whose material presence can never be entirely effaced. Nor does it withhold information about the actual spatial location of objects, producing instead what philosophers, referring to photographs, call “spatially agnostic informants.”8 Photographs, chemically or digitally enabled, are, in other words, re-presentations of an experienced world with a difference, always mimetically imperfect, always non-identical with the objects or events they capture for later contemplation. Even when they allow us to experience new visual phenomena—or better, old ones in new ways—through arrested motion or enlargement, giving us access to what Walter Benjamin famously called the “optical unconscious,” photographs do so by revealing their secrets to the camera eye first and the human one second.9 For these reasons, their tacit truth claims require a translation process, in which they signify or represent, to borrow C.S. Pierce’s familiar trichotomy, via a mixture of iconic and indexical signs with the occasional symbolic supplement. However much they may resemble what they depict, they are not equivalent to it.10

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7 This confidence, to be sure, may be misplaced, as Arild Fetveit pointed out to me in a personal communication, when the metadata is itself manipulated.


10 It can, of course, be argued that this is true of all sensual experience, which to one degree or another fashions objects not perfectly equivalent to their external counterparts. As Jonathan Crary shows in Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century (Cam-
the world directly, pace commentators like the early Roland Barthes, they are dependent on extra-technological conventions that establish their verisimilitude, those "rules of photographic integrity" cited by the judges in the World Press Photo contest. Although these conventions and mediations may be construed as ways to maintain perceptual contact with the world rather than simply distort it, as some commentators have insisted, they nonetheless trouble the naïve notion of accurate recording of what is photographed.

Or if one prefers to think in very different terms about the idea of truth itself, although defenders of the truth claims of photography may invoke the rhetoric of truth based on the adequate correspondence of an image in the mind’s eye to the object it represents, the Scholastic idea of *adequatio rei et intellectus*, photographs may draw their power instead on an alternative view of truth. That is, they may abet the disclosure or unconcealment of a world hitherto unseen, or truth in Heidegger’s sense of *aletheia*. As such, they may share a certain revelatory capacity with works of visual art, which also do more than merely report or reflect the world as it has always already been seen. Even if we may not be convinced by the Heideggerian account of truth as disclosure, it alerts us to the possibility that the simple opposition between artistic and photojournalist practices of photography may be problematic.

It is for all these reasons that the resistance to photography’s aesthetic pretensions in the name of accurate, documentary realism—or at least resistance to the creative moment in the objective recording of an undocotted truth—has always had something implausible about it. However automatic the recording device, however much contingency may sneak into the finished result against the intention of the photographer, however much the world discloses itself in unexpected ways, there is also always some choice made in the point, click and crop moment that brings a particular image into existence. In other words, the camera eye is itself a function, at least in part, of the intervention of the photographer. Even such a staunch defender of the truth claims of photography as the contemporary critic John Roberts builds his case by acknowledging that “the photodocument is a critically *ostensive* medium, it points at and picks out things because the photographer judges these things to be worth attending.”

There is thus a certain continuity between pre-photographic staging defined as “something that would not have happened without the photographer’s involvement” and his or her decision to take the picture at a particular moment from a particular angle in a particular light. If you are skilled enough, to borrow Henri Cartier-Bresson’s famous phrase, it will be the “decisive moment,” capturing something extraordinary, even revelatory. But even if you are not, the resulting representation is still never of the world as it actually is.

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Although often celebrated by those who want to include photography with painting among the visual fine arts, this disparity can also lead to dismay over the ideological potential in photographic practice when it is seen to abet an unwanted and deceptive aestheticization. Take, for example, the case of Walter Benjamin. In his celebrated 1931 essay, “Little History of Photography,” where Benjamin coined the term “optical unconscious,” he approvingly cited the warning of the Russian-born photographer Sasha Stone that “photography-as-art is a very dangerous field.”

Benjamin’s prime example was the much-lauded album by the Neue Sachlichkeit photographer Albert Raenger-Patsch, *Die Welt ist Schön*:

“The creative in photography is its capitulation to fashion. *The world is beautiful*—that is its watchword. In it is unmasked the posture of a photography that can endow any soup can with cosmic significance but cannot grasp a single one of the human connections in which it exists, even when this photography’s most dream-laden subjects are a forerunner more of its salability than of any knowledge it might produce.”

What Benjamin, in other words, feared was the capacity of the photographer to prettify the reified world of commodities, imbuing the surface appearances of modern life with an aura of aesthetic value without, however, penetrating to the dialectical relations beneath them that were the deeper truth of that world. Or as he put it when he returned to Raenger-Patsch’s work in his essay “The Author as Producer,” “it has succeeded in transforming even abject poverty, by recording it in a fashionably perfected manner, into an object of enjoyment.” In contrast, he invoked the images of vacated city streets by Eugène Atget, which had been rightly compared with crime scenes, and posed the rhetorical questions: “But isn’t every square of our cities a crime scene? Every passer-by a culprit? Isn’t the task of the photographer—descendent of the augurs and haruspices—to reveal guilt and to point out the guilty in his pictures?”

Benjamin’s distinction between deceptive and aestheticized appearances and the truer and more brutal realities beneath them depended on a dialectical notion of reality that located truth in occluded contradictions rather than superficial harmonies. Anticipating Guy Debord’s critique of the “society of the spectacle,” he lamented the visual equivalent of commodity fetishism in which the underlying human sources, both in terms of productive labor and the suffering of unjust compensation for it, were forgotten. What he elsewhere damned as the “aestheticization of politics” was also at work, *mutatis mutandis*, in the duplicitous beautification of a world whose deeper ugliness—and the guilt of the system that produced it—remained hidden. For Benjamin, such images were mendacious, even if they involved no pre-production staging or post-production doctoring.


**15** Ibid.


**17** Ibid., p. 527. Haruspices were Roman priests who practiced divination, often from the entrails of animals who had been sacrificed.
What, however, distinguished his position from contemporary defenders of a realistic photojournalism that seeks to distinguish itself as radically as possible from art photography—or a somewhat tendentious versions of it—is the alternative he defended against the Neue Sachlichkeit beautification of the world. He may have invoked Sasha Stone’s warning against “photography-as-art,” but he admired Stone’s own work, which owed a great deal to the constructivist aesthetics of the journal G, whose leaders included Moholy-Nagy, El Lissitsky and Mies van der Rohe. Benjamin, in fact, considered the photomontage that Stone did for the book jacket of his own *One-Way Street* in 1928 “one of the most effective covers ever.” In his “Little History of Photography,” he also cited Brecht’s claim that “the reification of human relations—the factory, say—means that they are no longer explicit. So something must in fact be *built up*, something artificial, posed.” And then he added, “we must credit the Surrealists with having trained the pioneers of such photographic construction.”

In other words, for Benjamin, the possibility of overcoming photographic mendacity based on conventional notions of harmonious formal beauty lay in the ability to harness other aesthetic innovations to counteract the reifications of a world whose deeper workings could not be revealed in allegedly “objective” images that stayed on the surface. Here, we might say, the spear that had caused the wound—aestheticization as mere beautification—could be wielded once again to cure it—aestheticization as constructivist juxtaposition and defamiliarization. That latter, however, is not based predominantly on the creative imagination of the artist, who conjures up images *ex nihilo*, but rather his or her manipulation and combination of fragments of images and sometimes texts that existed before. In other words, however much photomontages were the product of a *monteur*, an inspired assembler, they were also still based on the semi-automatic process of photography itself and the re-constellation of the visual readymades that resulted. It was an activity, we might say with a nod to Heidegger, that could disclose a truth hitherto occluded, albeit one that was the truth of historical materialism, not existential phenomenology. Along with the revelation of the “optical unconscious” through techniques like enlargement and fast shutter speed, constructivist juxtapositions could break through the crust of conventional seeing and allow us to gaze at the world with fresh eyes.

Whether photographic truth is advanced by the abjection of the aesthetic, broadly understood as any deliberate staging of a scene, as the jurors for the World Press Photo think, or by its proper employment for critical constructivist purposes, as Benjamin had believed, what is clear is that those who seek it are convinced of the danger that certain photographs can be mendacious, providing a false, ideologically nefarious view of the world. Alerting naïve viewers to the “lies of photography,” to cite the title of an 1899 French newspaper article exposing composite images of alleged political allies during the Dreyfus Affair, is, in fact, frequently advocated by those who worry how easy it is to be taken in by their implicit truth claims.

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18 This qualification is necessary because not all contemporary art photography relies on techniques that favor artifice over mimesis. There are many examples of photographs that have earned acceptance as works of art without sacrificing their truth claims as indexical traces of actual events in the world.


21 *Ibid*.

But what, I want to ask, does it mean to say that a photograph can actually lie? Is it the image itself that intentionally deceives or is it something else that is added to it that is responsible? Is a photograph that lies merely one that lacks the qualities that allow others to make convincing claims to be truthful, or does it actively have to do something more? To address these questions, we have to pause with the issue of what constitutes a lie in the first place, an issue that inevitably moves us away from images to language. Although there are, of course, many different ways in which linguistic questions can be approached, let me invoke only two, speech act theory and deconstruction, with a quick nod to Michel Foucault’s thoughts on the subject as well. Pseudologists or students of mendacity indebted to the first tradition tell us that, strictly speaking, a lie is a speech act with four distinct components, and has both constative and performative qualities. The first component is the liar’s conscious, but unexpressed knowledge of the truth or what he or she thinks is true. For example, I look outside the window and know it is a sunny day and not raining. The second is the liar’s utterance, verbally or in writing, of an assertion that is the contrary of or at least at variance with what the speaker knows or thinks is the truth. This is the locutionary or constative aspect of the speech act, a statement about either objective or subjective reality. I say “it is not sunny, it is raining.” The third is the liar’s illocutionary intention to deceive the listener or reader into believing that such an assertion is indeed true, although the speaker knows or thinks he or she knows otherwise. I intend you to believe falsely that it is raining, even though I know or at least believe it is not. A corollary of this intention is to convince the listener that the speaker is trustworthy, or at least to rely on the listener’s unreflective assumption that the speaker indeed is. In other words, I also want you to believe or continue to assume that I am a truth-teller and not a liar. And fourth and finally, if the lie is what can be called a “felicitous” speech act, its perlocutionary effect is indeed to persuade the listener or reader that what is not the case actually is. You fall for my intended deception and now think it is indeed raining, and are thus conned into buying one of the umbrellas I have for sale.

It is important to note the difference between a simple error articulated without an intention to deceive and a lie. In the Middle Ages, for example, honest men and women would have said that the sun went around the earth. Although what they believed was wrong, they were not mendacious or untrustworthy. Ironically, one can intend to mislead and yet tell the truth, if one’s belief in what is the case is itself flawed. In other words, one has to distinguish clearly between the truth and error, however we define them, and the truthfulness or mendacity of a speaker, whose intentions are more important than the veracity of his or her assertions.

There is also a crucial difference between unconscious deception—say, a chameleon changing its color automatically to fit into a new environment—and a conscious decision to lie by a responsible agent. Deception happens all the time in nature, especially when it comes to the dance of death between predators and prey or the competition for sexual partners, but there are no lies involved in the sense we have described above. As Jacques Lacan notes in Écrits, “an animal does not pretend to pretend. He does not make tracks whose deception lies in the fact that they will be taken as false, while being in fact true ones, that is, that indicate his true trail. Nor does an animal cover up its tracks, which would be tantamount to making itself
the subject of the signifier.” Pretence or deception in nature is not dependent on any kind of signifier, Lacan argues, because it is not situated in the general order of signification that is language. He calls this order of signification another locus from the dyadic interaction of predator and prey, “the locus of the Other; the Other witness, the witness Other than any of the partners.” The Other (le grand Autre) is not something constituted empirically through the use of language, not a norm imposed by language, but is rather the transcendental condition out of which languages emerges, the presupposition of truth-telling that underlies all speech acts. As a result, there is always an asymmetry between truth telling and lying, the latter being parasitic on the former. Whereas falsehood is an unjustified truth-claim, telling the truth is not an unjustified lie, but rather a justified assertion of the truth. Significantly, there is a verb “to lie,” which suggests an agent who acts on his or her own initiative, whereas there is no verb “to truth,” because the premise of telling the truth is hard-wired into language as such as its transcendental a priori, at least when it involves assertions.

What is sometimes called human self-deception, in which one part of the self allegedly knows what is true, but hides it from another, may be understood as hybrid case, as it combines elements of intentional lying with unintentional deception. Or because it rarely involves speech acts, it may be something outside of the problematic of lying entirely, perhaps better understood in terms of the psychoanalytic concept of denial. But however we consider such anomalous cases, by and large the distinction between natural deception without a speech act and human lying through one is worth maintaining.

Finally, we should also understand that lies have an important temporal ambiguity built into them. They involve constative assertions about the current or past state of the world or the actual beliefs and the intentions of the speaker. When they are false promises, they are current assertions about future actions, which they now pretend they will carry out at some later time. But the performative intention of all lies is entirely future-oriented, that is, to produce in the listener or reader a false understanding, a misleading belief in what is or was not the case (or when it comes to false promises, a mistaken belief in what will, in fact, not be the case in the future). All lies, we might say, are based on the imagination of what is not now the case, performatively making a new future reality, or at least a new belief about it. It is for this reason that Hannah Arendt could audaciously contend that there was a critical link between lying and political action, for both were based on imagining a possible change in the status quo and a different future.

24 Ibid.
25 There are, of course, other types of speech acts, for example prayer or the writing of fiction, in which this transcendental premise does not obtain.
26 For a discussion of denial in philosophical and literary as well as psychoanalytical terms, see Wilfred Ver Eecke, *Denial, Negation, and the Forces of the Negative: Freud, Hegel, Lacan, Spitz and Sophocles* (Albany, SUNY Press, 2006).
With those clarifications behind us, it may seem that we can now return to the question of photographic mendacity. To help answer it, however, we have to widen our lens a bit to consider, if briefly, the larger question of the issue of truth and lying in visual experience in general. Here we may find some inspiration in the work of two stalwarts of 20th-century French theory, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. A number of years ago in a remarkable book called *The Truth in Painting*, Derrida pondered the implications of Cézanne’s promise in a letter of 1905 to his friend Emile Bernard “I owe you the truth in painting and I will tell it to you.” Examining what he called the painter’s “speech act promising perhaps a painting act,” Derrida noted that Cézanne “promises that he will say the truth in painting.” In exploring the implications of that promise, Derrida first examined the assumption that paintings or other art works were self-sufficient entities unto themselves, disinterested enclaves walled off from the external world and capable of expressing their own internal truth. Deconstructing the distinction between *ergon* and *parergon*, a work based on the capturing of creative *energia* and the frame around it, he showed instead that the boundary between them was always permeable. What seemed an extraneous, ornamental excrescence like columns in front of buildings, the pedestal under a statue or the garment draped over it inevitably intruded on the objects themselves, undermining the integrity of allegedly autonomous and autotelic work of art. Examining then the alternative claim that the truth of a painting could be found outside it in terms of representative fidelity to the object mimetically depicted, he looked carefully at the dispute between Heidegger and the American art historian Meyer Schapiro over the alleged model for Van Gogh’s painting *Old Shoes with Lacings*. The latter had claimed that they were the artist’s own unlaced shoes, the former that they were those of a peasant, but Derrida said that the dispute could not be definitively resolved on the evidence each provided. The implication he drew was that the truth of a painting could not also be derived externally through reference to the accuracy of its representation. He finished by looking at paintings that contained snippets of writing on the canvas, in particular the work of Valerio Adami, which he denied could be read with confidence in either mimetic, semiotic or formal terms. The upshot of these explorations was the conclusion that radical undecidability thwarted all attempts to find the truth in painting promised by Cézanne to his friend.

In this book, Derrida did not address the specific question of whether paintings, if they can’t, *pace* Cézanne, tell the truth, can instead be accused of lying. The question of mendacity, however, was treated in one of his later essays entitled “History of the Lie: Prolegomena,” which appeared in the collection *Without Alibi* in 2002, and it is from this piece that we can perhaps infer his possible answer. In it, he stressed the performative quality of the lie, “which is not a fact or a state; it is an intentional act, a lying. There is not the lie, but rather this saying or this meaning-to-say that is called lying.” In addition to stressing the importance of the action over the deed, he also insisted on “the irreducibly ethical dimension of the lie, where the *phenomenon* of

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29 Ibid, 8-9.
31 Ibid, 34.
the lie as such is intrinsically foreign to the problem of knowledge, the truth, the true and the false.”

The liar betrays the trust of the person he or she seeks to mislead, in particular the trust in sincerity on which normal assertions in communicative interaction depend.

A similar stress on the ethical, intersubjective dimension of lying as the breaking of trust between people characterized Michel Foucault’s ruminations on the ancient Greek notion of parrhesia, which he defined as “a verbal activity in which a speaker expresses his personal relationship to truth, and risks his life because he recognizes that truth-telling as a duty to improve or help other people (as well as himself).”

Foucault’s interest in the verbal performance of the truth-teller, based on his or her sincerity, is relevant to the question we are addressing because he pitted it against a more modern notion of epistemological validity based on the testimony of the eyes. In an earlier essay, whose arguments I won’t rehearse now, I sought to explore the implications of Foucault’s thoughts on truth and visuality. It concluded that however much he may have favored certain ocular practices over others—for example, the decomposed calligrams of a René Magritte over the traditional Cartesian perspectivalism of mimetic representation—he never supported the ideal of “truth-showing” or visual parrhesia as an antidote to sinister practices such as the surveillance of the panopticon.

There are several lessons that might be drawn from Derrida and Foucault’s analyses of the complex relationship between visuality in general and truth-telling, which bear on the question of photographic mendacity. One is the distinction between lying as a speech act—telling a lie, parasitic on the act of telling the truth—and an image, whether a painting or photograph, which shows something, either in the world or in the imagination (or a mixture of both), but cannot say or tell it. Thus photos lack crucial dimensions of the speech act of lying outlined above, in particular prior consciousness of the truth and the intention of saying otherwise to fool a second party. Although non-verbal images can, of course, have illocutionary intentions once their conventional codes are established—think of a skull and cross bones on a bottle of poison, warning you not to drink it, or a red light at a crossroads—by themselves they are mute, a condition shared by photographs. If there is a transcendental a priori for visual experience—and philosophers like Kant have argued there is in spatial intuitions—it is not “le grand Autre” of language in Lacan’s sense of the term. The implication of all this is captured in Tom Gunning’s observation in his insightful essay “What’s the Point of an Index?, or, Faking Photographs,”

the apparatus, in itself can neither lie, nor tell the truth. Bereft of language, a photograph relies on people to say things about it or for it . . . . Both historically and institutionally, in order to tell the truth, the photograph must be subjected to a series of discourses, become, in effect, the supporting evidence for a statement . . . . [I]n order to speak the truth the photograph must be integrated into a statement, subjected to complex rules of discourse—legal, rhetorical and even scientific.

32 Ibid., 29.
33 Michel Foucault, Fearless Speech, ed. Joseph Pierson (Los Angeles, 2001), 19.
35 Gunning, "What’s the Point of an Index?, or, Faking Photographs," 42.
A second plausible lesson to draw concerns the intersubjective and ethical dimension of lying. There is nothing in the taking of a photograph per se that is inherently intersubjective, let alone involves an ethical relation between subjects. I can take a picture of my big toe for my own private admiration and never show it to another human being. There are, to be sure, many photographs that do involve interactions between subjects, and elaborate protocols have emerged concerning the implicit contract that ties the photographer with the photographed, one that often has legal ramifications in terms of ownership of the resulting image. And if Ariella Azoulay is right in her controversial study of *The Civil Contract of Photography*, the contract can have profound political and human rights implications as well.  

To return to the offending photograph by Giovanni Troilo, which cost him his World Press Photo prize, was such a civil contract betrayed in the case of his cousin’s unwitting partner in the staging of their illuminated love-making in that steamy back seat in Chaleroi, Belgium? The answer to that question may well be yes, at least in the terms set by the contest, but it is not clear that the reason has anything to do with the mendacity of the image, which simply recorded what the flash revealed. One can even claim that by using a flash, the photographer enabled a sharper image of the event he wanted to capture, and in this sense made possible a “truer” effect—or more precisely, a greater claim to verisimilitude—than if it had been in the shadows. So, although the photo was disqualified because the event it depicted was staged rather than merely captured, the image itself was innocent of any lying in the sense we have been developing.

The upshot of all of these considerations would seem to be that claiming photos can lie is based on a category mistake, a confusion of the logics of figurality and discursivity, of showing and telling. Their temporality is inherently past-oriented, magically preserving an ephemeral moment that no longer is, whereas lies, as we have argued, are future-oriented, seeking to change the status quo rather than merely record it. They are, moreover, only contingently intersubjective, whereas a lie—the ambiguous case of self-deception aside—is essentially so. If photos deceive, and we know of course that they can, perhaps it is best to group them with the unintentional, non-linguistically mediated deception of the natural world rather than with the human-all-too human speech act we call lying.

And yet before we too hastily adopt this conclusion, it may be worth returning to one of the arguments we have encountered in Derrida’s exploration of Cézanne’s promise to show his friend the truth in painting. In his discussion of the distinction between *ergon* and *parergon*, you will recall, Derrida challenged the ideal of aesthetic immanence, the claim that works of art are organic wholes with clear boundaries separating them from extrinsic contexts of production and reception. Instead, he argued that the supplement of the frame always inhabits the interiority of the work, which cannot achieve its effect of self-sufficiency without it. An aesthetics of pure form, seeking to abject materiality, or pit poesis against mimesis, is always haunted by what it banishes. The self-pleasuring of a work, its “auto-affection,” is never complete: “the most irreducible heteroaffection,” Derrida writes “inhabits—intrinsically—the most closed autoaffection.” Or to put it in more temporal terms, the reified solidity of the *ergon* cannot contain for very long the *energia* that went

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37 Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 47.
into its production and that is unleashed by its reception, in the same way that Marx argued that the fetishized commodity cannot entirely obliterate the memory of the labor that went into its production and the use to which it will be put.

If we extrapolate from this argument about paintings and other works of art to photographs, it suggests that however isolated the image may seem from its discursive context, however “bereft of language” the photo may appear to be, it is nonetheless not entirely immune from contamination—or enrichment—by its enabling contexts of generation and reception, which include discursive moments. When we take seriously the congealed intentionality in a photograph, which, as we noted earlier, extends beyond conscious staging of the scene or post-production manipulation to include the choice in deciding to take it at a specific moment and aim in a certain direction, we can say that the finished image, however self-contained it may seem, is always haunted by the process that produced it. Appearing in more than just the added caption or the post facto written interpretation of the image, discursive interruption of the pure figurality of the image already occurs in the residual impact of previous photographs and the ways in which they have been integrated into discursive circuits of meaning. Tom Gunning comes close to acknowledging this integration when he follows his statement about the apparatus’s inability to lie or tell the truth with the acknowledgment that

historically and institutionally, in order to tell the truth, the photograph must be subjected to a series of discourses, become, in effect, the supporting evidence for a statement ... [I]n order to speak the truth the photograph must be integrated into a statement, subjected to complex rules of discourse—legal, rhetorical, even scientific.\(^\text{38}\)

Drawing on Derrida’s argument about the *ergon* and *parergon*, we might push this argument a little further to say that the subjection of the image to a discursive context is not something that happens after it has come into the world as a mute object, something that is tacked on from the outside, but rather has always already happened in the constitution of the image itself. As in the study of movies in which discrete “films” are best understood as permeated by the forces that constitute “cinema” as an englobing institution, involving production, distribution, reception, preservation and intermediality, the seemingly isolated image that we call a photograph cannot be entirely extracted from the mediations of the larger context we call photography.

In fact, the very term “photography,” introduced to replace the earlier “photogenic drawing” and promoted by William Henry Fox Talbot in *The Pencil of Nature* (1844), may also alert us to the entanglement of the figural and the discursive. As Hagi Kenaan has recently noted in an insightful essay on the role of shadows in the origins of photographic images, the neologism includes “the Greek *graphein* with its double-sense meaning of drawing and writing. The term *photography* thus introduces a certain ambivalence into nature’s pencil, which now operates between drawing and writing, between visual depiction and the codified signs of a language.”\(^\text{39}\) He then adds that the new process of image-making enabled the “ability to see the shadow

\(^{38}\) Gunning, “What’s the Point of an Index?,” 42.

as a code and, consequently, to create a new visually uprooted image whose self-
sufficiency is no longer indebted to vision.”

It is perhaps for these reasons that the truth claims of photography are never
reducible to a simple indexical trace of the real, the automatic registering of an object
or event through a chemical or digital process. As we’ve seen in the case of Benjamin
with his pitting of one tacitly aesthetic practice against another, photomontage
versus the beautification of reified surfaces, truth can be understood as a dialectical
construct, not a passive recording of the world as it appears. Pure disclosure or
unhiddenedness, pace Heidegger with his notion of aletheia, needs a helping hand. Not
surprisingly, we find Benjamin advocating the conscious imbrication of figurality
and discursivity, when he writes “what we require of the photographer is the ability
to give his picture the caption that wrenches it from the modish commerce and gives
it a revolutionary useful value.”

The contemporary critic John Roberts, sharing the same militant political agenda
as Benjamin, contends that the truth claim of photography is not based on its
direct, unmediated showing of something in the world, but rather the shock it gives
to our normal, unreflective experience of sight, the violation of our conventional
way of looking. It is what he calls its “indirect or secondary ostension,” based on
“an undeclared secondary meaning” which is “essential to the social and discursive
claims of photography.” The act of disruption, even one that may violate the privacy
of the subject photographed, is what overcomes the soothing aesthetic effect that
Benjamin so disliked in his critique of Neue Sachlichkeit superficial beauty. It has
a future-oriented intention in unsettling the visual status quo. There is an affective
truth in photography, which Roberts identifies with “its unrivaled capacity to reveal
the fact that what we see is not convergent with what we know to be true, and therefore
that what we know about what we see we are unable to freely assimilate—there is a
fundamental gap between representation and truth.”

The implication of these challenges to what we might call the mimetic ideology of
the photograph’s truth-showing for our own question of the photograph’s ability to
lie is clear. If photographs are necessarily embedded in the larger institutions and
practices of “photography” and those institutions and practices have an inevitably
discursive moment, we can understand them as the contested sites of figurality and
discursivity, which are intertwined, although not collapsible one into the other. If
photography’s truth claims are more than just a function of the unintended, indexical
moment in the process of recording but also depend on discursive assumptions, and
if lying is parasitic on truthfulness, as we have seen it is in linguistic terms, then it
may well be the case that mendacity can also be discerned even in the mute world
of the photographic image. As the philosopher Arthur Danto once put it when
discussing the practice of photographing people unaware, “cameras do not lie,
but photographers do.” What in fact makes the hybrid practice we call taking a
photograph so richly over-determined is its ability to show and tell at the same time,
sometimes with parallel implications and sometimes not. It is ironically because

40 Ibid., p. 570-571.
41 Benjamin, “The Author as Producer,” 230.
42 Roberts, Photography and its Violations, 155.
43 Ibid., 158. Italics in original.
the “rules of photographic integrity,” to cite the normative procedural standards invoked by the jury for the World Press Photo contest, are never really observed in their pure state that we can meaningfully speak of the ability of photographs to be truthful, and also to lie. And to compound the irony, such lying may result from reinforcing the naturalization of a world of reifications that reflect a social reality that needs to be disrupted, even violated, to reveal a potential for an alternative that may have a better claim to the truth. Or to give the screw one more twist, if Arendt is right about the link between lying and resisting the status quo, it too may under certain circumstances have a critical function, pointing to a future truth denied in the present world. Maybe Giovanni Troilo, not despite but because of his staging, deserves his prize, after all.45


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45 My thanks to Arild Fetveit of the University of Copenhagen for his astute reading of an earlier draft of this essay.
Double Lives: Reiterations of Gender Violence in Anti-Femicide Protest

Amanda K. Figueroa

Abstract

Mass femicide is made possible by an environment of impunity afforded to the injury of women. This work demonstrates how women are crafted into victims before the first instance of physical injuring, by expanding the definition of femicide to include violence against women that occurs before and after death. An archive of antifemicide protest by Susana Chávez and Diana the Huntress of Bus Drivers is used to highlight the productive nature of reiterations of femicide violence. Analyses draw from feminist theories of embodiment and performance theory in order to make legible the cyclical nature of gender violence.

Since the mid-1990s, women have been murdered in the El Paso-Cd. Juárez area in epidemic numbers. The reality of femicide at this borderland is markedly unavailable by usual forensic means; the bodies of women are mutilated past the point of identification, and statistics regarding femicide are incomplete if kept at all. Considered as a single instance of injuring, or even 4,000 single instances of injuring as some activist organizations estimate, femicide remains illegible and therefore unpreventable. It is not until the violence is reiterated by antifemicide activists in literature, protest, or vigilantism that the loss of young women and the horrific violence done to them becomes recognizable at a societal level. Femicide is represented twice, not as a discrete instance of violence, but as a larger social phenomenon that begins long before and ends long after the physical death of victims. Only when antifemicide activists reiterate violence, like the stripped Diana the Huntress statue shooting her arrows to the sky, or the vengeful Diana the Huntress of Bus Drivers vigilante taking a life for a life, can the trauma of femicide be made available to be seen, acknowledged, understood, and stopped.

This paper seeks to expand the understanding of femicide radially outward in two directions to include both the ontological deconstruction of women that occurs long before their deaths, and the second iteration of femicide violence after death that ultimately makes these crimes and their victims legible. I argue that mass femicide is made possible by an environment of impunity afforded to the injury of women, particularly in domestic violence and corporate human rights violations, and will demonstrate how this impunity crafts women into victims of femicide before the first instance of physical injuring. By making use of an archive of antifemicide protest, including the vigilantism of Diana the Huntress of Bus Drivers, as well as the poetry of Susana Chávez, the productive nature of reiterations of femicide violence will be highlighted. Analyses of both sides of the femicide phenomenon will draw from feminist theories of embodiment, border studies, trauma theory, and performance theory in order to make legible the cyclical nature of gender violence.
Toward a New Definition of Femicide

Femicide refers to the serial murder of women, linked through common characteristics. In Juárez, bodies are discovered on societal fringes, in empty urban lots, garbage cans, or undeveloped desert. Complete corpses show evidence of rape and other sexual trauma: bruising and lacerations at their sexual organs along with semen and other foreign bodily fluids. Bodies are frequently found wearing another woman’s undergarments. Not all victims are so physically complete. Mass graves are unearthed containing the body fragments of multiple women, often so deconstructed that they are unable to be reassembled or identified. In particularly large grave sites, the disembodied limbs are so unidentifiable that a total count of victims remains undetermined.

Scholarly discourses on femicide use the term to specifically reference only the act of bodily gender violence against women. While it succeeds in highlighting the physical trauma suffered by women, and alludes to the ontological destruction of femaleness that is the goal of injurers who enact such violence beyond mere killing, this understanding of femicide reduces the violence against women to bodily injuring alone.

This paper makes use of the materiality of the femicide corpse (or corpse fragment) as the origin of all understanding of this gender violence, but also uses the term to designate the disembodied, social violence against women that predicates the physical. This expansion of the term femicide acknowledges the atemporal and fractal nature of the murders occurring in Juárez, in which every point in the phenomenon contains the same elements: female bodies opened in order to be surveilled inside and out, sexually punished, and therefore ontologically deconstructed. In Juárez, women are physically killed just once, but that killing comes as a result of the social phenomenon this work calls femicide. Women may move in and out of the process of femicide, experiencing one, several, or all of the methods of surveillance and enforcement. The torture and murder that designate the dominant definition of femicide is the climactic moment of this phenomenon, the moment where figurative, metaphorical, or social violence is made physical, but denotes only a single part of the larger systems at work.

The violent injuring that occurs in Juárez is indeed exceptional in its extremity. The length of the encounter between victim and murderer is too prolonged to be simply an act of killing. The sexual abuse and torture that occur before death, and the dismemberment and/or immolation of the body after death, allude to a desire to do more than just kill, but also ontologically destroy. That is, the criminals who commit femicide seek not to destroy a single woman, or murder would be enough. Rather, in deconstructing the female form, treating victims as interchangeable in mass graves, we must understand that it is not a single woman but womanhood itself that is the target of these attacks. The perpetrators seek to destroy the unacceptable notion of femininity in their actions, to destroy the identity of women, not merely to kill a single woman. In destroying the body beyond recognition, they destroy the

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1 The phenomenon this paper terms “femicide” is also referred to in English-speaking discourses as “feminicide” or, in Spanish, “feminicidio.”
conception of women as ontologically or identifiably human. This understanding proves that femicide belongs not in the conversations of quotidian crime, but rather the realm of horror, defined as that which “[offends] the ontological dignity of the ‘complete’ or ‘singular’ body” by Adriana Cavarero.2

Equally applicable to femicide is Elaine Scarry’s comments on the collapsing of world that occurs in the deliberate infliction of pain, into which femicide surely fits: during torture, “it is not the pain but the regime that is incontestably real.”3 By encouraging us to think about the regime that endorses torture and grants it sovereign power, Scarry’s definition provides a vehicle for intervention in the definition of femicide that refers only to the moments of injuring. The regime that becomes “incontestably real” during femicide is the patriarchal and neoliberal power structures at work in the borderland, which create the environment of impunity for gender violence in Juárez. Previous academic and humanitarian work on the Juárense femicide trend has acknowledged these root causes for gender violence, but separates them from bodily violence. My analysis builds upon work by Leslie Salzinger, Rosa Linda Fregoso, Melissa Wright, and others, who have documented the responsibility of patriarchal gender norms and cross-border capital in creating and maintaining an environment in which women are easily victimized. I argue that not only do these institutions allow the injury of women to occur; they are each actively performing the same acts of bodily surveillance and gender enforcement as femicide, and therefore belong under the same definition. By examining the policing and surveillance of female identity upon which these entities depend, the fractal nature of femicide is highlighted. This surveillance begins the process of ontological deconstruction that is mirrored and taken to the extreme in the moments of injuring.

When we choose to understand femicide as a phenomenon of ontological and physical destruction of women, we must also consider the aftermath of death. While the instance of injuring is the apex of this destruction, after death several processes exist that seek to repair the destroyed female identity. Forensic reconstruction by state-empowered medical examiners often fails to undo the disidentification and ontological destruction that signifies femicide due to the extreme violence, collective graves, and interchangeability of victims. In order to succeed at repairing the identities of victims, local women paradoxically reiterate the abject injuring of femicide in their antifemicide activism. These activists, whether poets, political activists, or vigilantes, redraw attention to the very site of injuring in order to capitalize on the female body at its most visible point under the environment of femicide. In reiterating femicide violence, activists make legible the injuring against women, using the horror invoked by abject violence to temporarily halt the patriarchal and neoliberal structures that make femicide possible.

For living women, femicide truly is a “double wound,” to invoke Cathy Caruth’s definition of trauma. The public performances of violence that constitute antifemicide activism are also instances of public grief and mourning for the victims of femicide. The work of Susana Chávez and Diana the Huntress of Bus Drivers are acts of memorialization of victims, acts that communicate the trauma of being victims themselves, acts of identity-claiming in a borderland that seeks to

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destroy, trespassing womanhood, and acts of survival. They are crying out, as Caruth describes trauma, "in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is otherwise unavailable."4

**Patriarchal and Neoliberal Surveillance**

Patriarchy and corporate devaluation prime women for the violence that many of them suffer later in the process of femicide. Long before women are victims of injuring, they are victims at the hands of the cultural impunity for social violence against women. In the words of Rosa Linda Fregoso, women in the Juárez-El Paso borderland are seen "not simply as victims of globalization but as subjects in need of patriarchal regulation."5 Considering patriarchal gender norms exacerbated by the North American Free Trade Agreement to be two types of Fregoso’s regulations is not only intuitive, it is statistically proven.6 Regulation and surveillance of women stems from cultural norms, which stigmatize wives and daughters who choose to leave their families and work outside the home, often in the local maquiladora industry, and from the maquila managers themselves as well. In both cases, the gaze that regulates women through unflinching surveillance, the gaze that turns apathetic in the moments of injuring, is masculine.

The implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1993 marked the beginning of an upward trend in femicide at the Juárez-El Paso border. The El Paso-Cd. Juárez border is ranked fifth in land trade among U.S. foreign trade gateways, and 18% of all U.S.-Mexico trade passes through this single port of entry. As a manufacturing hub, the area "represents over $8 billion worth of purchases" according to the city of El Paso.7 The economies of not just the U.S. and Mexico as a whole, but the local economies of El Paso and Cd. Juárez are dependent on this trade. Among many new regulations, NAFTA removed tariffs for United States imports to Mexico, but left in place the subsidies for American farmers, and as a result, an increasing percentage of rural families fell into poverty. The Juárez population increased, as displaced farmers sought jobs in urban centers, and women increasingly sought jobs outside of the home. These women became especially prized as workers in local factories because of their willingness to accept low pay and illegal conditions for employment, due to cultural disapproval of female workers and the desperate need of their families for income. Roughly 60% of all maquiladora workers are women, who are paid about $4-10 per nine-hour shift and are subject to discriminatory hiring practices.8

Within the maquiladoras, women have been subject to illegal conditions such as health code violations, inability to unionize, body scans, and monthly mandatory pregnancy tests. Pregnancy tests in particular are specifically outlawed by

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6 Fregoso, *meXicana Encounters*, 359-373.
Mexican government, but have been reported to continue at American factories including General Motors, General Electric, and AT&T.9 These acts of biopolitical surveillance do indeed make female bodies legible to the corporation, but only as bodies, streamlined, maintained, and absorbed into the mechanical processes of manufacturing. The ontological dignity of the maquiladora workers is therefore disrupted long before physical violence takes place. In these instances of factory surveillance, female bodies are digitally and medically separated from the identities of women. What is made legible to factory managers is not a complete woman, but rather female flesh defined by its relationship to biologic functions. Women are crucial to the economic stability of the area, and constant surveillance of women is what makes their labor most cost effective to industry.

Not all of the victims of femicide, to the extent that they are able to be identified, are maquiladora workers, but in their position as central, life-giving institutions within Juárez and the local community, the factory surveillance of women becomes the template that is repeated throughout the culture. That this factory surveillance aligns so closely with patriarchal surveillance of women only serves to increase its effects. Fregoso finds this link to be especially clear as she writes, “women who do not conform to the mother/wife model of womanhood (lesbians, working women, women who express sexual desire, and so forth) are suitably punished.”10 The surveillance of women, whether in the home or in local maquiladoras, is the first instance of ontological deconstruction that goes unpunished.

Women, even dead women, are not invisible in this environment. It is simply that their bodies are only legible when they are generating labor. Julia Kristeva describes the corpse as “the utmost of abjection,” the ultimate point of tension between the recognizable human, in the case of women the ultimate labor-producing human, and the horror-inducing other, from which no meaning can be made.11 Femicide induces horror not through destroying the identity embodied in the human, female form, but through destroying the potential labor that is the only identity women in this borderland are able to have. To be an inanimate female body, a body in pieces, a body exhausted of value, is to be illegible, impossible to be read for meaning. When we view femicide not as discrete acts of violence that occur in a vacuum but rather as brief, obscured moments of surveillance and abjection that transform female bodies from legible as commodities to illegible corpses, we can see that all women are victims of the climate of surveillance that makes such an act of secreted violence possible.

**Destroying the Castle: the Protest Poetry of Susana Chávez**

For Susana Chávez, this environment of femicide not only spurred her to political activism, but also to artistic representations of the victims through her poetry.12

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10 Fregoso, *meXicana Encounters*, 4-5.
12 Chávez’s works, still available posthumously on her blog, *Primera Tormenta*, have yet to be
In both her writing and the performance of reading her works publicly (often at antifemicide protests and events she organized herself), Chávez showcases an intimate knowledge of the unmaking power of injuring. She focuses closely on the materiality of femicide, the body horror produced in the corpse, and in doing so, harkens to the truth of femicide as abjection of women. Even on the level of linguistics, Chávez’s careful choice to use gendered pronouns (e.g. “nosotras,” “nuestra”) in reference to otherwise neutral physical properties of the body (“sangre,” “piel”) specifies women, and disallows the application of her work to non-femicide injuring. The action of injuring is inverted, as the poems’ speakers use their abject bodies to refocus attention on the femicide victims. Chávez’s poetry heals the double wound of femicide trauma by reconstructing the victims as complete with body, agency, and voice, a re-embodiment that is impossible to achieve through forensic reconstruction alone.

In “Castillo de el aire,” Chávez writes in the voice of a victimized Juárense woman. The poem centers on this passive, invisible observation on the part of women who after death are completely silenced. Chávez’s speaker notes the paradoxical nature of this abjection, which through the ritual of femicide seeks to remove societal relationship with victims, but through violence and crime only prolongs that relationship, saying:

in the incident of absence,
from which doubt emerges
to show other silences,
other truth,
destroying the castles of air
we wove without ourselves
destroying eternity
devoured by absence.13

As previously noted, Chávez is careful here to use the female pronoun “nosotras,” “ourselves,” here, drawing attention to the devouring “absence” of women once abjection has erased them completely.14 Women in Cd. Juárez have indeed built the local economy without themselves, responsible for the cheap labor that allows the maquiladora industry to thrive even as they are consistently excluded from the profits or the accompanying class mobility.

The resonance of Chávez’s work can be seen in its lasting presence even after the author’s death. The well-known antifemicide slogan “ni una muerta más” coined by Chávez continues to be written on pink crosses that families and activists use to mark the mass graves of victims. The connection between art and the abject has been documented by Kristeva, who called it “the essential component of religiosity.”15

Here, this nexus of Chávez’s poetry, the Catholic crosses, and their location at the site of injuring work together not only to mourn the loss of female identity and life, but

formally translated into English; the translations that follow are my own.

14 In Spanish, lines 12-13 read, “destruyendo los castillos de el aire / que tejimos sin nosotras”; Chávez, “Castillo de el aire.”
15 Kristeva, Powers of Horror, 17.
also to make visible the deaths of otherwise invisible women through well-known cultural rituals: public art and religious rites of death.

By continuing to locate and perform the violence of abjection within the physical violence done to femicide victims, Chávez’s poetry invokes the same feelings of abject horror that the bodies produce. However, writing from the point of view of injured women themselves, Chávez infuses femicide violence with the voices of these women, otherwise silenced, and makes use of the abject horror to work against the very femicide which produces it.

**Two Dianas**

The original cast of the famous Diana the Huntress statue, *La flechadora de las estrellas del norte*, stands naked in Ixmiquilpan, Mexico. Nine feet tall, sculpted in bronze, she aims her bow and arrow towards the northern sky. Diana of Ixmiquilpan is injured, damaged at her hips, buttocks, and genitalia. Originally sculpted nude and unveiled in Mexico City in 1942, Diana the Huntress was attacked by Mexican conservative group ‘The Decency League’ for her uncovered body. They ultimately forced the artist, Juan Olaguíbel, to clothe the statue in newly cast coverings, which he welded to Diana’s body in three points. In 1968, when public opinion turned, a petition to remove the coverings from Diana was successful, but her bronze body was hurt in the process. The metal of her sexual features was scarred from enduring the hostile gaze of ‘The Decency Group’, the forced covering of her body, and the violent rending of her clothes away from her again. A new Diana was cast by Olaguíbel to stand in Mexico City, and the original was sent to Ixmiquilpan in 1970 where she still faces north.

The wounds inflicted upon Diana’s seemingly unfeeling metal body and her weathered, unblinking gaze to the north now seem like a parable for the sexually-motivated murder of women (femicide) taking place at Mexico’s northern border. Like Diana, women in the Cd. Juárez area are accosted by a masculine gaze and then ritually, violently have their clothes ripped from them. But unlike Diana the Huntress, the bodies of these women are made of flesh, not bronze, and the injuring done to them in rape and torture results not just in marred material, but mass death.

The northerly arrows being fired by Diana the Huntress now seem like warning shots after August 2013, when a woman wearing a blond wig boarded a bus in Juárez, murdered the bus driver, and escaped. The next morning she killed a second bus driver on the same line, again wearing the same blond wig, and again escaped. On the third day, an email sent to La Polaka, an online news site based in Juárez, took credit for the murders and called them an act of vengeance for the victims of sexual attacks committed by the murdered drivers. She wrote, “I am an instrument to avenge ... women who appear weak, but in reality we are brave.” This letter was signed “Diana the Huntress of Bus Drivers.” Enacting violence in retribution for femicide, the name the woman chose for herself is a tribute to to the same warrior-virgin Roman goddess as the statue.

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The violence enacted by Diana was real, although it contains performative aspects such as the blond wig and the claim of vengeance. What truly links Diana's vigilantism to Chávez's poetry of trauma is the attention to re-embodiment of femicide victims. Chávez reconstructs the bodies of victims through literary and metaphoric ways, but Diana uses her weapon to relocate violence from the bodies of women to the bodies of men, alleged criminals themselves.

In enacting violence in the name of victims, Diana highlights a paradox within gender violence: that the very process of femicide, designed to eliminate women completely from social awareness, only serves to prolong their relationship with society. Rather than submitting to the horror of the abject corpse, which allows female victims to remain disembodied or unidentified, Diana continues to draw attention to the violence against women through her act of vengeance. Unable to highlight the injuring done to women, she injures the bodies of the men she finds responsible for the violence, using male bodies as a proxy for the injuring of femicide. This relocation of the site of injuring mirrors the interchangeability of bodies in mass graves or in the wrong clothing, unable to ever be fully distinguished from each other. By injuring the alleged perpetrators of femicide, Diana further destabilizes the notion of individual and fully separated bodies with the suggestion that if victim identity is porous, so might be the relationship of power between injured and injurer.

A key part of the performance of violence by Diana is the blond wig she chose to wear, a deliberate symbol of hyper-femininity and marianisma culture, which provide a thin veil for the murder she commits. The use of femininity to obscure vengeful motives adds another layer of threat to the symbolic nature of Diana’s crime, and brings to mind the words of Mary Russo: “To put on femininity with a vengeance suggests the power of taking it off.” The wig equally subverts the anonymity or impossible identification of women, whether victims of bodily injury or not. Through these acts of violence and the performative nature of her disguise, which isolates and exaggerates her femininity to be her only identifiable trait, Diana is even able to claim a new name for herself, while femicide victims may not even recover the names given to them at birth.

To read Diana the Huntress of Bus Driver’s economy-impeding actions as unintentional due to the base nature of vengeance that her letter implies, dismisses the effects of her performed violence on the neoliberal structures in Juárez, and is disingenuous to the political project of her actions. As we know from her letter, Diana targeted her victims due to their predatory attitudes towards the women on their bus lines. In targeting these two men, not only did Diana stop the immediate danger they presented to local women, but she also wounded the movement of labor in Juárez by enacting violence that shut down the bus lines that frequently carried women from their homes in poor neighborhoods to work at the maquiladora factories. Diana’s acts of murder were justifiably demonized, but the irony of a bus line designed to safely carry workers to the poor physical and cultural conditions in the maquiladoras naturally goes uncommented. In enacting femicide violence on the proxy bodies of bus drivers, Diana demonstrates the precarity of the roles of

victim and murderer in an environment where bodies have become interchangeable in death.

Both Diana of Ixmiquilpan and Diana the Huntress of Bus Drivers represent the duality of femicide trauma in Mexico. Mythic and mortal, injured and injuring, hero and vigilante, Diana the Huntress seems to lead a double life in Mexico, bronze goddess by day and disguised murderer by night. If indeed she does, she would fit all the better into the femicide imaginary as told by Juárense police. Local officials often explain to families that their lost daughters must have secretly been prostitutes, drug addicts, or gang members in order to deserve the violent sexual assault, torture, death, and dismemberment that signifies femicide.

There is a double nature to femicide, as materialized in the two Dianas and alluded to in police narratives, but it is not alter-egos or furtive criminal activity on the part of victims. The duality of femicide is rooted in trauma caused by the destructive violence enacted upon women. Cathy Caruth’s definition of trauma as a “double wound” is particularly apt to talk about femicide injuring that is at once physical and ontological, visible and invisible, occurring both inside and outside of the bodies of victims.18

To view femicide solely as discrete instances of violence is to deny half of the femicide phenomenon as it occurs in the borderland. Femicide is a process of duality that, in its complete form, begins with invasive surveillance by women, leads to their illegibility and social death, mandates their physical suffering, and then makes necessary the reiterations of that suffering by those who seek to make bodies legible and thusly stop crime from happening. The ontological destruction that occurs in femicide, evidenced in the excessive, identity-obscuring violence that is emblematic of femicide, urges our reconsideration of bodies as distinct, separate things. The violence of femicide can and must be reiterated in antifemicide performances, whether literary or physical, in order to elevate injuring to a position of social legibility. Although dead, femicide victims lead a second life, or endure a second wound, in the poetry of Susana Chávez or the attacks of Diana the Huntress of Bus Drivers. They even find themselves echoed in the larger-than-life body of Diana the Huntress in Ixmiquilpan.

In order to understand the purpose of antifemicide reenactments of femicidal violence, we must first understand femicide itself not as a single act of injuring, or even a series of injurings, but rather as an atemporal, fractal series of moments, each containing the same elements of policing, surveillance, and ontological destruction of the bodies and identities of women. This expanded definition of femicide makes visible the roles of gender norms and cross-border capital in setting up the environment of impunity that makes femicide possible and highlights the need for a reconstruction of victims that capitalizes on performances of violence.

The female body is the only point at which women in Cd. Juárez are visible to state and cultural consciousness at large, and antifemicide protests find power in the productive violence of their reenactments of violence. In projecting outward the violence enacted on femicide victims, antifemicide activism makes accessible the

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18 Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 3.
double trauma of femicide, elevating female victims to social visibility often for the first time. The height of this visibility is evident as the protests strike against the infrastructure of neoliberalism and patriarchy, dismantling the systems at the heart of femicide. With an understanding of how gender violence is applicable to both destructive and productive agendas, we are able to understand how the full process of femicide unmakes and remakes the identities of women in Mexico.

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Visibility and Invisibility: Helen Priestman Bright Clark and the struggle for the Position of Women in the Society of Friends, 1873

Hannah Rumball

Abstract

Women Friends (or Quakers) held an antithetical position in their religious community during the nineteenth century. They were considered to be spiritually equal to male followers, and permitted to preach in public, yet were excluded from every major decision making process concerning the religion due to their gender. This text discusses the letters published in Quaker journals in 1873 on the subject of the position of women in the Religious Society of Friends. It analyses how this correspondence played a pivotal role in making Quaker women’s battle for gender equality in their religious organisation visible to a national unisex audience.

The late action of the Men’s Yearly Meeting in refusing to allow women Friends to unite with them in the proposed Conference on the state of the Society, may lead to consideration of the position of Women amongst us. It is sometimes said that they [women] have more advantages amongst Friends than in other bodies. The statement is probably made by those who are unacquainted with our discipline, but who know something of our peculiar views and practices with regard to the ministry, and who naturally suppose that a body that recognises the propriety of women preaching would allow its female members to unite in its meeting for business.¹

Analyses of the complex gender relations within the Religious Society of Friends during the second half of the nineteenth century have been recognised and discussed by Quaker historians and feminist scholars, including Thomas C. Kennedy, Susan Mosher Stuard and Sandra Stanley Holton.² These scholars have chronicled Quaker women’s historical role as public preachers and have acknowledged the small band of radical and politically minded Quaker women who became leading campaigners in the anti-slavery and suffragist movements. However, in their texts debates on Quaker women’s internal battle for gender equality in their own religious organisation have always been framed as another element of the national suffrage campaigns. As such, these scholars have remained ambivalent about acknowledging the pivotal role played by the letters published in Quaker journals in 1873 in bringing Quaker women’s subjugated position in the Religious Society of Friends to the attention of the religion’s conservative followers. This article acknowledges the significance of these letters. Close examination of these sources through archival research reveals them as powerful evidence of both the complexity of Quaker gender politics, and these women’s pursuit of increased visibility in their own religious community, during the period. The terms ‘visible’ and ‘invisible’ may be usefully deployed in this context to


categorise the distinct and antithetical roles which Quaker women occupied during the nineteenth century. However the complexity of Quaker women’s identities as occupying both of these categories during different spheres of action is illustrative of the fluid roles Quaker women played in their religious community.

In August 1873, the Quaker and suffrage campaigner, Helen Priestman Bright Clark, in her letter to the Quaker journal *The Friend: A Religious, Literary and Miscellaneous Journal*, identified the gender inequality which existed in the Non-Conformist protestant religion, the Religious Society of Friends. During the Summer of that year, a London conference called ‘State of the Society’ was proposed, where exclusively male followers would discuss how to rectify the religion’s dwindling membership numbers and poor attendance at religious Meetings. It instantly became the subject of censure by the excluded female members of the religion. The consternation vocalised by many Quaker women was, however, illustrative of a growing dissatisfaction at the established gender inequalities within Quaker disciplinary proceedings as well as in wider society. Ultimately, the conference acted as the catalyst for a religious wide, unisex debate which questioned the function and role of women in the Religious Society of Friends. As this text discusses, liberal and politically active Victorian Quaker women wrote letters to nationally available publications during 1873 challenging the discriminatory disciplinary structure of the religion. Thus these letters made visible both the inequality which Quaker women were subjected to and expressions of their dissatisfaction, which had been largely overlooked.

From the seventeenth century the Religious Society of Friends, known as Quakerism, asserted that female followers were spiritually equal to male followers. As Phyllis Mack has explained in ‘Gender and Spirituality in Early English Quakerism, 1650-1665’, “as all Quakers in the light had transcended their carnal selves, a woman preaching in public had actually transcended her womanhood.” Quakers sought to reject the Church of England’s gender biased, hierarchical teachings and customs, by doing away with Priests and sermons in their worship. Quaker beliefs centred on personal revelation for religious guidance and respect for the authority of scripture, which they described as the “Inward Christ, Seed, or Light of God.” As such, Quaker women were permitted by the religious community to preach in public to large audiences, often travelling extensively across the country to do so. The religion’s provocative and subversive religious ideas were fundamentally in conflict with the doctrines and practices of the established Church of England. Consequently both male and female Quakers were subjected to cruel and humiliating punishments for their beliefs. The Quaker Dorothy Waugh’s 1655 account described her confinement in an iron scold’s bridle for public preaching, as follows:

[...] they tare my clothes to put on their bridle as they called it, which was a stone weight of Iron by the relation of their own Generation,

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& three barrs [sic] of Iron to come over my face, and a peece [sic] of it was put in my mouth, which was so unreasonable big a thing for that place as cannot be related, and the mayor said he would make an example to all [...] and charged the officer to whip me out of town.⁵

Yet despite their equality in spirituality and levels of persecution, Quaker women always held a subordinate position to male members of the religion regarding who made the rules for religious followers and for enforcing discipline. Female Quakers were often entirely excluded from the day-to-day business of the Society altogether.⁶ Gender hierarchy was deeply embedded in the social structure of seventeenth-century British life, and whilst Quakerism valued women’s spirituality it never sought to abolish social expectations which framed womanly behaviour as domestic and subservient, as Susan Mosher Stuard confirms.⁷ Gender roles were therefore rigidly defined regarding practical elements of the religion not directly affected by Divine revelation.

Adherence to Quaker collective beliefs was strictly maintained through the religion’s organisation of gathering, decision making and the dissemination of ‘Advices’ and ‘Queries’ which sought to remind all followers of appropriate Quaker conduct. Persistent failure to comply with this religious guidance could mean ‘disownment’, or total exclusion from the religious community. These Advices were communicated throughout the religion via a hierarchy of meetings on a local and national level.⁸ Women’s Meetings, where women could join for worship and organise charitable acts, were sanctioned and encouraged by the religion’s founder, George Fox, from the 1670s. Yet, as Quaker historian Peter Collins has noted, while women’s Meetings ran parallel to those of the men during the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and visibly co-operated with them, women played a negligible role in the religion’s formal decision making processes.⁹ Whilst Quaker women did discuss matters of discipline in their own ‘Meetings for Discipline’, and reported their discussions to the parallel men’s meetings, the male Quakers were under no obligation to take the female view into perspective. Female Quakers were also excluded from the Men’s Yearly Meeting where all major decisions were made. Thus, Quaker women in reality had no say in the process of determining disciplines, Advices and Queries, which controlled how all Friends should dress, speak, behave, worship, raise their children and engage with non-Quakers. Such guidance was decided exclusively by a selection of Quaker men and then presented to the wider community. Even after 1784, when female Quaker representatives from across the

country became entitled to unite at a concurrent Yearly Meeting of Women Friends, their activities were still curtailed, as described in the minutes of the first Yearly Meeting of Women Friends on 5th June 1784:

[...] Yearly Meeting of Women Friends are at liberty to correspond in writing with the Quarterly Meetings of Women Friends, to receive accounts from them and speak such advice as in the Wisdom of Truth [...] yet such Meeting is not to be so far considered a Meeting of Discipline as to make rules nor yet alter the present Queries.  

Quaker women were nevertheless actively involved in radical political movements during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, spurred on by religious sentiments which encouraged benevolence, peace and neighbourliness. As Sandra Stanley Holton amongst others has clarified, female Quakers were Anti-Slavery campaigners as well as being involved in campaigns during the 1830s against the Corn Laws. They organised public meetings, fundraised, canvassed and petitioned on behalf of these causes. As such, Quaker women enjoyed socially visible, active and useful roles in radical political movements, a function they were denied within their own religion's structures. These Quaker women were thus seen by non-Quakers as enjoying a powerful position in their religious communities as they were granted freedom of movement and conscience.

Those with only an external vantage point of Quakerism viewed Quaker women's position within the religion as privileged. Feminist historian Susan Mosher Stuard has described such a perception as arising from Quaker women's 'successful resistance to societal norms', especially those which sought to increasingly narrow and circumscribe women's position in public society. Indeed, articles and correspondence in the mainstream press during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries promoted Quaker women's advantageous position by advertising their religious tradition of women preaching and being educated, whilst excluding mention of their subjugation to male members in matters of business and discipline. The article "Quakers and Votes for Women" in The Grantham Journal as late as 1913, claimed that Quaker women had always been the pioneers for female emancipation because their founder, George Fox, had encouraged gender equality, stating:

The Society of Friends [...] was actually the pioneer in the women's movement. George Fox taught the absolute equality of the sexes on religion and Church government, and at a time when advanced education was supposed to be a male prerogative.

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13 Stuard, Witness for Change, Quaker Women over Three Centuries, 4.
14 “Quakers and Votes for Women,” The Grantham Journal, 1st February 1913: 3.
Both of these statements however are highly misleading due to Quakerism's continued subjection of women in its ‘government’ throughout the nineteenth century and it’s reticence at formally advocating women’s rights until 1913.\(^{15}\)

Such a public perception of Quaker women as enjoying total equality within their religious community was additionally implied by many Quakers themselves throughout the nineteenth century, despite their knowledge to the contrary. Two letters published in *The Isle of Man Times and General Advertiser*, on 26th January 1878, debated the propriety of women preaching in public, one of which sought to defend women's prophecy. The Quaker writer, ‘J.H’ from Huddersfield, quoted numerous passages of Scripture where women “did actually pray and preach along with the men” and which presented women as “on a perfect level with man in every way.” In line with Quaker sentiments, J.H, regarding public worship, advocated “neither the men nor the women take the lead [...] for all [are] equal.”\(^{16}\) J.H did challenge the accepted Victorian social binary opposition of the sexes by promoting women’s spiritual participation, yet he failed to acknowledge the prejudices which still existed in the Society against women’s involvement in formal decision making processes despite debates on the subject occurring that decade. As such, J.H concealed the antithetical position of women within the Society from the argument and the readership. Clearly, many (largely male) Quakers and non-Quakers were quick to advertise Quaker women’s advantages yet slow to acknowledge their inequality in religious business.

Such absence, however, may in part be explained by the notion that it never occurred to male Quakers to contemplate the position of Quaker women as one of subjugation. Bright Clark even acknowledged this in her letter, conceding, “I do not write in any spirit of harshness; no doubt many men have hardly given the subject a thought.”\(^{17}\) Historically, women played supporting roles in Christian congregations and in society in general, and as such the notion of male and female Quakers’ total equality during the 1870s meant a radical re-thinking of conventional gender norms and religious roles, as Stuard notes.\(^{18}\) Mary Poovey has described this Victorian gendered social model as “an entire system of institutional practices and conventions at midcentury, ranging from a sexual division of labour to a sexual division of economic and political rights.”\(^{19}\) The subservient role of Quaker women

\(^{15}\) Whilst many radical Quaker women played significant roles in the women’s emancipation movement from the 1860s onwards they were by no means the norm amongst their co-religionists, see Holton, “Kinship and Friendship: Quaker women’s networks and the women’s movement,” 365. Furthermore, Susan Mosher Stuard has acknowledged that Quakerism has historically reflected many of the prejudices against women and similarly indoctrinated restrictive gender ideologies into their sons and daughters, see *Witness for Change, Quaker Women over Three Centuries*, 18.

\(^{16}\) J.H. “Lonan Enquirer’s Mistakes about Woman Preaching,” *The Isle of Man Times and General Advertiser*, 26th January 1878: 2.


\(^{18}\) Stuard, *Witness for Change, Quaker Women over Three Centuries*, 11.

to the male followers was therefore a reflection of the established position of women in the British social order and therefore Quaker women’s position was not a cause many men would have found unusual or disturbing. For Bright Clark, however, precisely because the subject of Quaker women’s position in the Religious Society of Friends had been historically overlooked, it was all the more important to debate it during the planned ‘State of the Society’ conference. In her 1873 letter published in The Friend, she suggested, “[..] there could hardly be a more suitable subject for the consideration of a Conference called to discuss the state of the Society than the position of one half of its members.”

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, women comprised the majority of the Quaker religion’s followers, yet despite this, they continued simultaneously to endure a visibly useful role through public preaching, travelling and acts of charity, whilst being invisible during the key religious, male-led, decision making processes. As discussed by Sandra Stanley Holton in ‘Kinship and Friendship: Quaker women’s networks and the women’s movement’, it was their involvement in the broader women’s emancipation causes of suffrage, the Married Women’s Property Committee, and the Ladies National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts during the 1860s, which made them determined to protest against the gender hierarchy in their own religious community. A handful of radical Quaker women, particularly of the Bright and Clark families, were advocates and activists for national campaigns concerning women’s rights by the early 1860s. By the 1870s therefore, these radical Quaker women refused to reticently endure disciplinary segregation any longer and sought visible printed platforms to vocalise their opinions.

Despite the three main Quaker publications being edited by men, the correspondence pages in Friends journals, namely The Friend, Friends Quarterly Examiner and British Friend, allowed Victorian Quaker women to express their opinions directly, rather than at second-hand, through the mediation of a male author(s), as had occurred in previous centuries, as Gill notes. Archival research has revealed that the letters pages in these journals were used to visibly express the opinions of Victorian Quakers to a national, unisex readership, on subjects as varied as the suitability of certain garments of fashionable dress, women’s emancipation and the burgeoning suffrage campaign, charitable causes, national political campaigns and interpretations of Scriptural teachings.

Bright Clark’s 1873 letter, “The Position of Women in the Society of Friends”, quoted at the beginning of this article, began by calling for “consideration” concerning the decision of the Men’s Yearly Meeting to refuse female Quakers the right to attend the ‘State of the Society’ conference. However by its conclusion, the suffrage campaigner had called for the establishment of gender equality in all the religion’s business, with women holding offices as “intelligent co-operators.” Bright Clark called on her fellow Quaker women to acknowledge the “delusion” that they held any advantages

22 Gill, Women in the Seventeenth-Century Quaker Community, 42 & 53.
within the Society by reminding Quaker women that their involvement in Women’s Meetings for Discipline was “needless” because the opinions voiced in Quaker men’s concurrent Meetings took precedence. Bright Clark then went on to imply that Quaker women were being infantilised by such treatment, by questioning how “playing at business can be made interesting to grown-up people?” Clearly, Bright Clark not only sought to make the subjugated position of Quaker women visible to both sexes throughout her own community, but also to encourage her Quaker sisters to assert their mature voices in matters of religious management:

[...] I think it would be well for women no longer to cherish any delusion as regards their advantages in other respects. Many are already painfully conscious of the unreality of their meetings for discipline, since the little business that they do has been for the most part already done for them in the men’s meetings, and they have no voice in the management of affairs.24

Between August and November 1873, at least six letters were published in The Friend on the subject of “The Position of Women in the Society of Friends”, with diverse opinions.24 Mary Waddington, in the September edition, shared the opinions of Bright Clark. She similarly began her letter by considering the gender status-quo in the Society through a tone of diplomatic reasoning. However, unlike Bright Clark, Waddington went on to invoke Scriptural imagery in support of her cause. In her letter, Waddington implied that the Society’s gender inequality was an ‘evil’ that had infected the community by being overlooked and was in need of being restored from illness:

That there is a large degree of awkwardness and inconsistency in an institution is, very properly, perhaps, thought not a sufficient reason for making changes so long as it is working to tolerably good purpose, and the mischief inherent in it does not crop out as a hindrance; but let it become certain that there exists not merely a theoretical mistake, but an active evil in such institution, then the time has come when it needs to be overhauled and ventilated, and made more healthy if it can be.25

23 Bright Clark, “The Position of Women in the Society of Friends,” 203
Waddington’s letter described how Quaker women were “suffering from the present arrangement”, and that women’s exclusion from the decision making processes undermined their loyalty to the religion because these women were robbed of their usefulness. Yet, Waddington was not alone in her approval of Bright Clark’s assertions. In further response to “The Position of Women in the Society of Friends” letter, the female Quaker, R.T., affirmed the inconsistency of gender equality in the Society by asserting that, “surely in a Society which professes to believe in equal gifts to both sexes, it would be desirable in conducting its business to recognise equal rights.”

However, the Quaker Alfred Bennet dismissed the debate in his September letter to The Friend, by simply stating that he supported the notion of women attending the ‘State of the Society’ conference, but that such a proposition had never been raised and therefore had not been discussed. Furthermore, he proposed that the proposition that had been raised, for women to hold a concurrent conference on their own on the same subject, could not be permitted because “such an allowed meeting, with distinctly subordinate authority, would be a mere mockery.” Many conservative Quaker men, and some women, within the religious community additionally believed that Quaker women already held an adequate amount of power appropriate to their gender, and derided Bright Clark, Waddington and R.T.’s demands for practical and disciplinary equality. In the same issue of The Friend the female Quaker, A.B., noted that whilst she did not relish her subjugation, it was Scripturally ordained in the passages of Timothy 2: 11-12 and Corinthians 14: 34-35. A.B. thus believed that women who sought involvement in the business of the religious community were “stepping out of their sphere.”

Despite such nationally visible published debate however, the ‘State of the Society’ conference went ahead on 3rd to the 6th November 1873 with the exclusion of women Quakers. The conference stopped short of including the position of women as a formal agenda point, despite the coverage of the debate in print. In a clear illustration of their awareness of the exposure the topic had received, however, they did nevertheless deliberate the subject. Whilst several male representatives argued for “men and women alike to have the care of everything relating to the more important affairs of the church”, many more male Quakers argued to the contrary. The Quaker, William Brockbank, argued that Quaker women “preferred to be left alone” in their meetings and thus felt religious disciplinary debates should remain an exclusively male sphere.

Despite some resistance from male members, upon its conclusion the conference did carry a motion to recommend the first concessions to women Quakers' practical equality. It advocated unisex Meetings for Discipline at a local level, stating “That much advantage may arise from more general and frequent joint conferences of men and women Friends, both in Monthly and Quarterly Meetings, in relation to such subjects as may rightly engage the united concern of all the members of the Church.” Yet this dispensation, far from being legislative, was only “a very general suggestion that the conference of men and women Friends in our meetings for discipline, should be encouraged.” As such, despite defending and even promoting Quaker women's right to publicly preach, many male Quakers stopped short of advocating a physical female presence in disciplinary meetings. Therefore, as Kennedy confirms, these male Quakers continued to advocate Quaker women's continued invisibility concerning matters of religious business.

Such a concession failed to satiate radical Quaker women's campaigning for total equality within the religious community. As Kennedy has noted, as the opinions of female Quakers on the subject intensified throughout the 1870s and 1880s, disapprovers of the campaign kept increasingly quiet. Finally on 29th May 1896, The Friend reported that an official religious committee, organised to investigate “the position of women Friends in our meetings for Church affairs”, conceded that female Friends from 1898 should be considered an equal and constituent part of all meetings for religious business and discipline. Helen Priestman Bright Clark had, once again, been a central female figure in voicing an opinion to the committee that “women Friends were very desirous of taking part.” According to the published 1896 minutes of the committee meeting, “Helen [Priestmen] Bright Clark [...] knew that some members of the committee did not desire the attendance of women; but sentiment should not be allowed to stand in the way of justice.” Whilst the committee recommended the gradual phasing in of the motion, to give time for “reconstruction” of meetings, it conceded that the passing of the motion was merely a reflection of “the system already at work in many parts.”

Thus success was achieved in 1896 with the Quaker women's campaign for “participation of women in all the Society's business”. Helen Priestman Bright Clark’s letter of August 1873 had, however, arguably acted as the pivotal moment in making the campaign visible to a national Quaker audience. Victorian Quaker women mindfully used the published platform of The Friend to initiate an important debate on the gender-biased structure of the religion. For the first time, male and female Quakers, and those who may have overlooked the subject, were exposed to

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34 Kennedy, British Quakerism 1860-1920, 222.
35 Kennedy, British Quakerism 1860-1920, 222.
the arguments of fellow female Friends who sought a fundamental re-evaluation of the position of women in the Society. During 1873, radical Quaker women used their campaigning acumen to make visible their invisibility in the decision making process of the religious body. Through non-violent methods therefore, Quaker women were successful in effecting change in established gender identities and roles during a period of a broader social pursuit of female emancipation, through the use of published platforms for debate in 1873, in order that their visibility within the organisation of their faith should be a true reality.

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Pesky Questions of (In)Visibility and (In)Humanity: Affective Imagery of Anti-LGBT Hate Crime

Helis Sikk

Abstract

This paper explores the complex interactions of race, class, gender and sexuality that fuel the affective imagery of anti-LGBTQ violence. Although statistics show black trans bodies as the main targets of bias crimes, popular media does not mirror that. More often that not, mainstream understanding of anti-LGBTQ violence begins and ends with the visibility of white male victims, such as Matthew Shepard. Most vulnerable to hate crimes, non-normative sexualities who do not fit this ideal image of the victim are left invisible within the established conventions and dominant aesthetics of the mainstream media landscape.

The attack against Eugene Lovendusky on May 24th, 2013, marked him as the ninth victim in just one month in a series of violent acts against the LGBTQ community in New York City. The very particularly styled black-and-white photograph of Lovendusky went viral (Figure 1). Since May 2013, there have been a disturbingly high number of homicides of trans women of colour outside New York City, but none of those cases have gained noteworthy attention in popular media discourse – they remained invisible to the public eye. The white urban gay male is the most visible transnationally iconic image of anti-LGBTQ violence in our media landscape. In this paper, I will explore the complex interactions of race, class, gender, and sexuality that result in such select yet popular images of anti-LGBTQ violence and the elimination of others. More specifically, I will focus on the dynamics of the affective economies that the heightened (in)visibility of anti-LGBTQ victims evokes.

The conditions of our current habitus1 do not really allow us to question popular images of anti-LGBTQ violence or enable to untangle the affective economies that

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1 In Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), Pierre Bourdieu describes the habitus as “the kind of practical sense for what is to be done in a given situation – what is called in sport a ‘feel’ for the game, that is, the art of anticipating the future of the game, which is inscribed in the present state of play, 25.” Habitus as the “feel for the game” in a particular social context helps to make “distinctions between what is good and what is bad, between what is right and what is wrong [...] and so forth it.”
they form. Sara Ahmed explains that in such affective economies, “emotions do things, and they align individuals with communities—or bodily space with social space—through the very intensity of their attachments.” 2 Explaining the nature of affective economies, Ahmed uses a Marxian understanding in which value increases through circulation using an M-C-M (money to commodity to money) formulation and where surplus value is added resulting in more M (money). 3 In other words, Ahmed sees emotions as social, material, as well as psychic currency that circulates among and between subjects and objects rather than “residing positively within them,” and through this circulation increase their affective value. 4 Although emotions do not reside in subjects or objects, they may be “a form of residence as an effect of a certain history, a history that may operate by concealing its own traces.” 5 Affect becomes only seemingly attached to specific images of anti-LGBTQ violence that are not instilled with emotion but rather animate the emotion that is circulating around them.

When looking at the particularities of our current affective economies of anti-LGBTQ violence, it is impossible to look at the photograph of Eugene Lovendusky and not be consciously or unconsciously informed by a 15-year-old case—the murder of Matthew Shepard (Figure 2). Matthew Shepard’s story is arguably one of the most well-known instances of anti-LGBTQ violence. Russell Henderson and Aaron McKinney met Matthew Shepard at a bar in Laramie during the evening of October 6, 1998. According to a popular account, the two murderers pretended to be gay and lured Matthew Shepard to go with them. The three men got into McKinney’s truck and left for a remote area east of Laramie. The beating started in the truck after McKinney apparently said, “We’re not gay, and you just got jacked.” 6 Matthew Shepard was pistol-whipped, tortured, robbed and left tied to a fence. He was found the next morning by two cyclists, and transported to the hospital in Fort Collins where he died 5 days later.

What followed was extensive national and international media coverage of the case. The intense visuality and A-list level celebrity attention devoted to his story have encouraged to this day the creation of theater productions, films, books, poetry, music performances and beautiful acts of public protest. As a student at the University of Wyoming I even witnessed Sir Elton John come down to Laramie, Wyoming, and give a 10-year anniversary benefit concert to commemorate Matthew

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3 Ahmed, “Affective Economies,” 120.
4 ibid, 120
5 Ahmed, 119.
Shepard. All this has neutralized a very complicated story and turned Shepard into a highly commodified symbol of anti-LGBTQ violence. In other words, this attention has given the Matthew Shepard story one uncomplicated narrative and foreclosed the possibility of alternate interpretations or different questions. Most importantly and disturbingly, this is the case that, so to speak, has decided the currency of our current affective economies, and set the standards for proper ways of reacting to this particular kind of outburst of violence today.

It is not easy to make sense of such affective economies of anti-LGBTQ violence, and not to either be completely callous or engulfed by emotion. In *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*, Slavoj Žižek provides a useful framework for discussing violence on logical levels as he recommends that we not look at violence directly, but instead cast “sideways glances.” According to Žižek, there are two kinds of violence: objective and subjective. Subjective violence – which dominates media discourse – is perpetrated by an agent who can be rendered accountable. Objective violence is inherent to the system comprising of institutions, politics and ideologies. When we look at subjective violence directly, we cannot give a proper conceptual analysis because we are overtaken by empathy and terror. At the same time a distanced and “cold” analysis of violence would reproduce and participate in its horror, and would be an example of systematic objective violence.

My "sideways glance" toward affective economies of anti-LGBTQ violence lies in the further important distinction that Žižek makes between truth and truthfulness. Žižek explains that in order for an account to be truthful, the survivor of rape, for instance, is expected to explain events in a confused and inconsistent manner. A rape survivor that orders events in a completely coherent and methodological way is suspicious. Truthfulness is really a balanced combination of coherent and incoherent ways of reporting. Importantly, established consistency lies in this perceived inconsistency. The fact that we only see a certain amount of confusion and inconsistency as truthful when it comes to victims or survivors refers to a consistency of violence on the next logical level. In other words, truthfulness that is predominantly articulated in what Žižek sees as subjective violence, becomes an instrument of objective violence.

At the level of media representations truthfulness means particular aesthetics that implicitly make some cases more truthful than others. The current most truthful image of anti-LGBTQ violence is a black-and-white medium close-up image of a clean-cut white gay man. The defining image of Matthew Shepard in a grey sweater did not appear in news media until after his death. The image first chosen for publication by national and international media was of Matthew Shepard in his home kitchen. We see Shepard in front of kitchen cupboards, holding what appears to be a dishtowel in his hands. The logic of figuration and context makes the viewers the intruders who have the opportunity to let their voyeuristic tendencies run wild because Shepard is not looking back at us. Importantly, this is a snapshot in a domestic setting and considerably different from the black-and-white fine-tuned photograph we have settled on now. Lisette Model has argued about the truthfulness of snapshots: “I am a passionate lover of the snapshot, because of all photographic images it comes

8 Ibid., 4.
closest to truth. The snapshot is a specific spiritual moment. It cannot be willed or desired to be achieved. It simply happens, to certain people and not to others.”

There is innocence in snapshots because they are private. In the case of Matthew Shepard this privacy evident in snapshots was paired with the privacy that the family demanded after his hospitalization.

The photo series that we have become most familiar with today consists of at least four poses, mostly published as black-and-white images. Shepard is pictured in a desolate environment; walking in the midst of abandoned buildings or standing next to a rusty window. The visual politics of Matthew Shepard are very much shaped by his mother, Judy Shepard, whose book jacket featured one of the photographs from the series and who chooses to display those images during interviews or when visiting talk shows.

This photograph, that solidified Matthew Shepard’s status as the quintessential victim of anti-LGBTQ violence, shares remarkable similarities with the image of Eugene Lovendusky, the founder of the anti-violence activist group, Queer Rising, who was attacked on May 24th near Time Square when 9-10 men “started yelling ‘faggot’” and punched him in the jaw. The New Civil Rights Movement blog was first to publish the black-and-white medium close-up photograph that was later used as a poster for rallies. The two skinny, white, blond-haired gay men are strikingly similar in appearance. The words used to describe Matthew Shepard – “classy, stylish, and cultured” and with a “very clean shaven look” – can easily be applied to Lovendusky who is a skinny, white, blond-haired gay man. Lovendusky looks like an older metronormative version of Matthew Shepard who has the support of his community and life experience to fight back.

The two images also share formal characteristics and have a similar logic of configuration (Figure 3). Both are medium close-up images with the camera angle

placing us eye level with the men. These are professional photographs, not the out-of-focus selfies or snapshots we often see of victims of violence on online news blogs. The fact the images are black-and-white is not insignificant. There is an aura of some unexplained “original truth” in the black-and-white photograph, as Roland Barthes has argued.13 Barthes saw the photograph as violent in this perceived honesty, “not because it shows violent things, but because on each occasion it fills the sight by force, and because in it nothing can be refused or transformed.”14 Photographs use this “force” to make a lasting impact on people as they allow statements that make no sense in real life to become indisputable for remembered life.15 In this context, the use and circulation of specifically styled photographs helps to make certain images of anti-LGBTQ violence truthful and others untruthful in our popular imagination.

The aesthetics of representation tell a multilayered story of anti-LGBTQ violence. How stories are constructed and put together (what kind of words are used, next to which images and so on) create a particular kind of affect on their own. In our everyday consumption we tend not to pay as much attention to the affective qualities of the structural aspects of news. Walter Benjamin argued that we apprehend architecture “in a state of distraction, unlike other practices, which we consume with due attention in appropriate surroundings – or try to.”16 I would argue that when it comes to the form and syntax of online news, we take in information in a similar “state of distraction,” which perpetuates the invisibility of objective violence.

In the first two months of 2015, trans women of color were murdered at rate of almost one per week.17 One way of critiquing the established conventions of the affective economies of mainstream online culture and coming out of our current “state of distraction” is to look at which stories get published and receive attention and which ones do not. As discussed earlier since Lovendusky’s attack on May 24th, 2013, there have been a disturbingly high number of homicides of trans women of colour outside New York City, but there has not been an outrage one might assume to take over popular media discourse. Konyale Madden was found beaten to death in her home in Savannah, Texas on September 1st, 2013. Melony Smith was discovered beaten to death in her hotel room in Baldwin Park, California on September 9th, 2013. Ms. Hartley was found beaten to death in her home in Baton Rouge, Louisiana on September 19th, 2013. Eyricka Morgan was stabbed to death in her home in New Brunswick, New Jersey on September 24th of the same year.18 However, the habitus of our current media cultures does not let us see such images. As one women explained, “My grandmother is 90 and I have more dead friends than she does. Killing us is nothing new. It’s like being a policeman. When you go to work,

14 Ibid., 91.
you know you might get shot. It’s just something that comes with the territory.”¹⁹

Online news media that caters to the taste of the mainstream audience continues to focus on white, male, and urban cases that fit the transnationally iconic image of anti-LGBTQ violence.

Another way to notice the overbearing racism and misogyny evident in online news coverage is to pay attention to how the cases that do not fit the ideal profile of a victim get portrayed. For instance, “Ms. Hartley” who was found dead in a vacant building in Baton Rouge, Louisiana was referred to as a “transvestite” by the Baton Rouge local newspapers as and The Baton Rouge Advocate used her birth name and male pronouns in her obituary.²⁰ It is also usual that in cases that deal with trans women of color their arrests for prostitution are mentioned, as was the case with Hartley. Journalists did not even investigate the story enough to find out Hartley’s preferred first name.

It is notable that no image was included with the murder case of Hartley. Again, we can assume that this means bad investigative work on the part of the journalists. However, including an image in the context of a murder case often perpetuates the same old stereotypes rather than draws attention to groups of people who are most vulnerable to hate crimes.

The image used by online news sources to report on the murder case of Eyricka Morgan shows her on a bed in her underwear with a bottle of liquor behind her (Figure 4). It is very uncommon to encounter a full body shot of a male identified victim of anti-LGBTQ violence.

Not to mention that I have yet to find a news story that is accompanied by a sexual and provocative image, but focuses on a male victim. Suggesting they are rare. What made this coverage even worse was that the New Jersey Star-Ledger initially used Morgan’s birth name, male pronouns, and refused to apologize or correct their mistakes in articles that remained accessible to readers (although the newspaper switched to Morgan’s preferred name in later articles).

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¹⁹ Ibid.

Photographs may seem anachronistic with the range of possibilities of media today yet they are still arguably the most affective bits of information. Susan Sontag has argued that our memory as a “freeze-frame” has a single image as its basic unit.21 According to Sontag, “photographs – and quotations – seem, because they are taken to be pieces of reality, more authentic than extended literary narratives.”22 Therefore, photographs that permit us to linger over a single image of horror indeed have a greater affective impact on viewers than violence on television and in movies.

As the previous discussion indicates, the aesthetics of photographs used to accompany news stories about anti-LGBTQ violence on the Internet are varied. On the one hand, we have the extremely polished photographs in the like of Lovendusky and Shepard. On the other hand, we have the low quality photos taken by bystanders or most often by the victims themselves after or before the incident. Therefore, the digital vernacular of anti-LGBTQ violence has its own set of aesthetics that are mainly informed by the truthfulness of reporting (as discussed earlier), but also by the often-tumultuous relationship queers have always had with technology, self-portraits and authority. The majority of images used in online news stories are not polished professional photographs yet they share characteristics that are common enough to talk about a specific digital vernacular of anti-LGBTQ violence. There are two kinds of images: 1) photograph taken after the attack in order to provide evidence of bodily harm and injury 2) a photograph taken before the attack for private or public (social media) use that gets picked up the media.

If the photograph is taken after the attack in order to have a record of injuries, the victim is alive and the image works as a way to have control over a situation in which the person’s control over the safety of their body was minimized. In the case of such images, the victim often chooses to post the image on social media. The screenshot of Ben Stoviak’s Facebook post from October 7th 2013 shows a close up of his face and written account of the incident (Figure 5). According to the post, Stoviak and his boyfriend were attacked in the evening of October 6th after leaving a local bar in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania.23 The image appears to be taken in Stoviak’s home. We can see a beige couch and a pillow to his right in the background and a light coming from the space lamp from the right. The top of his head and part of

his jaw do not fit in the frame, but we can see the right side of his face with visible bruises on his forehead, cheekbones, and lips.

One of the most obvious aspects of everyday and ordinary use of the internet is the connection between different devices that provide Internet access. Most photos are taken with a smartphone. Stoviak’s post received thousands of “likes” and “shares,” and was picked up and used by online news blogs, The Huffington Post among them to contribute to the displays of subjective violence that is exciting, clickable and therefore marketable. These reactions to violence are genuinely important in our society of spectacle of 2015. In such a setting it is the consumer of represented brutality who judges on the truthfulness of displays of violence and death, and not so much the perpetrators or victims. It is important, however, to notice the relationships between technologies, social media, and the audience in order to be able to critically look at this particular culture of violence, and the communities it creates.

The shared consumption and transmission of sentiments through telemediating devices evokes what Karen Tongson in Relocations: Queer Suburban Imaginaries calls “remote intimacy.”24 Tongson credits the term to Jennifer Terry and, building on her work , argues that “in a pre-digital age, remote intimacies were practiced through the shared consumption (or some would say overconsumption) of broadcast television and popular music, as well as by ‘hanging out’ live.”25 In our current digital world, the internet, and especially more recently the convergence of different media on the internet allows “remote intimacy” to take up an unprecedentedly extensive space in our lives.

The second category of images is not taken with the intention of reporting an act of violence on the part of the victim. Sometimes the person in the images has survived the attack and has given permission to use the photograph, and in the case of death, the image is pulled from the person’s public social media account (mostly Facebook) or given to the media by the relatives, close friends, or chosen family. One of the images picked up to talk about the shooting murder of Mark Carson in New York City was a low angle close-up image of showing his face and upper body (Figure 6). He is leaning forward and wearing a red T-shirt that reads ‘HOTTIES.’ It reads

25 Ibid.
as a mirror image because it has been taken most likely with a camera attached a computer or laptop. The picture is taken indoors, perhaps at his home as we can see part of a white window awning and black shades in the background. The photograph is slightly off center. We can only see one of his left shoulders fully; the right shoulder does not fit in the frame. The light is coming in from the upper left corner of the image which makes part of his shaped head shiny. The image is rather pixelated and lower quality than that of Stoviak's, which against the backdrop of established truthfulness of anti-LGBTQ violence and hierarchy of images leaves Carson on the margins.

Media images of violence have been picked for us to represent a myriad of interests. Currently the truthfulness of anti-LGBTQ violence discourse confirms that victims of certain ideologies (urban white gay men) are more deserving than others (queer people of colour). Despite the somewhat increased visibility in the last few years, the reality is that trans women of colour remain most vulnerable to street, police, and structural violence. Out of all the documented anti-LGBT homicide victims in 2014, 80% were people of colour and 50% were transgender women, whereas transgender survivors of color were 6.2 times more likely to experience police violence. Trans women of colour are also four times more likely to live in poverty than the rest of the general population and the prevalence of HIV among trans women is nearly 50 times as high as for other adults. Statistics always hide more than they reveal and although dreadful, those numbers give us an illusion of having an understanding of or control over injustice and violence whereas in fact we do not.

Although there was a considerable response to deaths of Mark Carson and Eyricka Morgan, as queers of colour, they had to pay more in blood to achieve this kind of visibly. The criminalization of non-white bodies does not allow for a smooth transition to be included in the image of truthfulness of anti-LGBTQ hate crime. Even with current limited visibility, non-white and especially female identifying victims get judged against established mainstream LGBTQ aesthetics, the ideal of which is a polished image of a white gay male: Matthew Shepard. As this papers demonstrates the often invisible established conventions and aesthetics of mainstream media perpetuate the current affective economies of anti-LGBTQ violence, which grant visibility to white male bodies and leave everyone else visibly culturally insignificant.


Significantly, this report includes data only from organizations who are partners with NCAVP that is headquartered in New York City. Founded in 1995, the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (NCAVP) brings together anti-violence programs in cities and regions across the United States. Although this report is by far not perfect, it’s more thorough than the annual FBI report on hate crimes.

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The “Homofeminine” Lesbian: An (Un)Intelligible Identity?

Isabelle Coy-Dibley

Abstract

This paper examines the “homofeminine” lesbian – an (un)intelligible identity that grapples with notions of intelligibility as an identity on the cusp and borders of intersectionality between heterosexual and lesbian cultures. Through this I will question how identities that appear normative in their conforming genders, but are anti-normative in their non-conforming sexualities, subvert and transcend Western culture’s social norms, yet equally remain (in)visible and trapped by the power-discourses that generate these norms. I will argue that theories of intelligibility must reflect a greater discourse of diversity, creating bodies of (un)intelligibility, rather than focusing on notions of difference and otherness that proliferate the gap between intelligible and unintelligible bodies.

The term “homofemininity” was originally coined by the gay activist editor of Drummer magazine, Jack Fritscher, in 1977. The term was under-defined in comparison to his concept of “homomasculinity”, receiving little notoriety or conceptualisation, which has persisted until now. In the 1970s, Fritscher, as editor in chief of Drummer, felt the necessity to invent a new vocabulary to articulate “the love that once dared not speak” in order to have specific words, “gay words,” that related to sexual identity and erotic-play that had previously remained inarticulate. When expressing his use of the term “homomasculinity”, Fritscher stated that,

I focused my high-concept term not on sex, as in the word homosexuality, but on gender identity for masculine-identified men. I designed homomasculinity as a calm and supportive word, unlike the word hyper-masculinity which, because of the prefix hyper, sounds like a clinical analysis of the bad, exaggerated, and swaggering machismo of insecure males straight and gay. Respectful of female-identified lesbians in leather, I coined, at the same time, the coordinate term homofemininity.1

Other than suggesting “homofemininity” as a coordinate term, Fritscher does not articulate what this term conceptualises, maintaining it as an elusive enigma. Comparable to how “homomasculinity” signifies a calmer, more supportive word that breaks from the exaggerated machismo of hyper-masculinity, I intend to position “homofemininity” as a similar, calmer notion of hyper-femininity, one that can be performed by females considered both heterosexual and/or lesbian femme. Whilst Fritscher states that he focuses the term not on sex, but gender-identity, I equally feel that this term needs greater clarity within the gender/sexuality dichotomy and relation, particularly with the supposed correlation between specific gender, sex and sexual preference. Similar to Fritscher’s position that “homomasculinity” is a masculine-identified homosexuality, “homofemininity” will be situated in similar terms within this paper, as a feminine-identified homosexuality.

However, lesbian cultures have already constituted the terms butch and femme that generate gendered binary oppositions within these sexual identities, so why would the conceptualisation of “homofemininity” be useful in terms of intelligibility between gender and sexual identity? Whilst I understand the significance of roles played by the constructs of “butch-femme” interactions, due to the loaded, heavily theorised and often negatively positioned connotations of butch-femme relations, I believe their identity constrictions require an alternative re-evaluation of lesbian culture. Similarly, femme has often been conceptualised as an “inauthentic” lesbian and in a hierarchical relation to butch, once again inscribing the negative with femininity and the positive with masculinity. Within *Femme: Feminists, Lesbians and Bad Girls*, Laura Harris and Elizabeth Crocker note that,

> It is ironic that the very visibility as lesbians that makes butches targets of homophobia in public spaces also makes them more visible as “real” lesbians than femmes in the context of a lesbian community. While both butch and femme positions have been vexed within lesbian and feminist communities, the visibility of butches has often empowered them to speak for butch-femme. Thus femmes have been seen neither as “real” feminists within feminist communities nor as “real” lesbians within lesbian communities.²

Subsequently, I want to posit the theorisation of “homofemininity” as a more ambiguous concept of lesbian femininity that draws upon androgynous modes of femininity, stepping away from the continuation of a binary opposition to masculine identities and the negative positioning of femme. However, by suggesting a “middle ground” between femme-butch, where femininity is not “actively” performed and masqueraded in the same way as it has been materialised as such within femme’s consideration of femininity, I will consider how this “in-between” identity negotiates the borders of heterosexual and lesbian communities, questioning the term’s level of intelligibility. Since “femme” has been theorised or perceived as hyper-feminine or consciously performing femininity, the “homofeminine” lesbian diverges from this to sit on the precipice between butch and femme that still “passes” under the radar of heterosexual society. Subsequently, I hope that querying how a more inclusive consideration of diverse femininities in both lesbian and heterosexual communities could make her identity more intelligible and that the recognition of (un)intelligible “border-treading” bodies may provide an alternative, more sinuously subversive approach to undoing gender and it’s synonymous connection to both sex and sexuality.

I will explore how the “homofeminine” lesbian navigates city-spaces and the gazes of others that cement her as an arguably (un)intelligible subject; neither intelligible, nor unintelligible, but living on the borders of both heterosexual, patriarchal society and lesbian communities. I will grapple with the “homofeminine” lesbian’s notion of intelligibility due to her ambiguous position of appearing both normative in her conforming gender to sex, yet anti-normative in her non-corresponding sexuality, which together subvert, transcend, but equally entrap her in the power-discourses that generate Western culture’s social norms. To contextualise this paper, the concept of “intelligibility” will be put forth in relation to how Judith Butler has theorised

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the term as the way in which “becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility”3 is how an individual becomes intelligible. In other words, an identity becomes comprehensible by adhering to social norms, which often assume a coherent relationship between (biological) sex, gender and the sexual orientation and preferences of an individual. This assumed relationship arguably begins from birth, before the child can consciously perform coherent gender constructs, in that the observed genitalia automatically suggests an “innate” gendering essence, which is precipitated by the way in which the child is then clothed, spoken to and treated by those around them.4 The social expectation of this assumed alignment of coherent gender to biological sex is often what in fact continues to produce and precipitate this supposedly synonymous relationship. The intelligibility of an identity is generated through repetitive performance that produces a continual and coherent gender identity that is recognisable within cultural norms. These norms prescribe specific performances that must be uttered in certain ways in order to be perceived as intelligible. Consequently, Butler articulates how the coherence of an individual’s intelligibility, whilst produced through performative utterances, is ultimately socially instituted and maintained through societally normative notions of sex, gender and sexual orientations.

In contrast, an unintelligible identity is constituted as a body that performs societally normative constructs when, according to the dominant mainstream standards that govern such bodies, it should not. For example, if a male body is considered to be performing a high level of femininity, this supposed incoherence between the male body and its gender performance may make this individual unintelligible. The actual femininity itself is not unintelligible, instead, what is perceived as less intelligible is the relation of this gender performance to the specific body subsuming this performance. However, when an individual repetitively undertakes this performance, this precipitate a set of behaviours, mannerisms and gender signifiers that generates an intelligibility whereby the individual becomes recognisable as someone who consistently undertakes those performances. Consequently intelligibility is not a static condition, but one in which there is potential for change and by examining an identity on the border between intelligibility and unintelligibility, I intend to question the assumed synonymy between sex, gender and sexuality.

Gender and the way in which it is inscribed upon/within the body often has a privileged relation to sight in the way in which an individual may wear certain clothing or exhibit certain aesthetics, behaviours, and mannerisms that suggest a level of coherent gendering of feminine or masculine traits. Sexuality, within its assumed relation to gender, has equally been perceived as obtaining a privileged relation to sight; therefore, as Amy Villarejo points out:

What does it mean to assert a “specular morphology” of lesbian, or lesbian as image? It means to suggest that lesbian has a privileged relation to sight, not as essence but as effect. I am not saying that lesbian is merely appearance, but that it is in appearance that lesbian frequently is. This is not to exclude or continue to denigrate touch, smell, sound, or taste (for surely at least some of us, save Queen Victoria, have felt, smelled, heard, and tasted lesbians), but it

4 Ibid.
is to suggest that lesbian is most commonly seen. Why, and in what ways? What does it mean to see a lesbian, and what do we think when we think we have seen a lesbian? What are the politics of the look?\footnote{Amy Villarejo, \textit{Lesbian Rule: Cultural Criticism and the Value of Desire} (London: Duke University Press, 2003), 56.}

Who has the right to look, to inspect the lesbian body? Within \textit{Lesbian Rule: Cultural Criticism and the Value of Desire}, Villarejo presents the lesbian as a position with a specific relation to sight. To see a lesbian means to place a specific set of beliefs, politics or sexualisation onto a body, and to acknowledge an identity that is anti-normative. A lesbian’s visibility ensures that she will be looked at with the knowledge of whom she desires to attract, objectified as a lesbian rather than a heterosexual woman for a masculine gaze. Additionally, the environment arguably alters who has the right to see and desire. Lesbian bars or social spaces allow females to gaze upon each other. Knowledge of sexual orientation enables a permissive boundary to form, whereby if we are perceived as lesbian, we attract, welcome, allow or at least anticipate the gaze of other women upon us within these spaces. But what of the spaces where this potential right is muted and deemed either unacceptable or simply unrecognisable?

With the example of the female-only public bathroom, an extremely gender-specific space, one can grasp how fully ingrained normative gender constructs are in everyday spaces as well as how fundamental aesthetic-markers of femininity are to signifying the female body and how an individual is gazed upon within these spaces. Jack Halberstam emphasises the experience of inhabiting spaces that adhere to strict gendering, stating:

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[...] \text{women’s rest rooms tend to operate as an arena for the enforcement of gender conformity. Sex-segregated bathrooms continue to be necessary to protect women from male predations but also produce and extend a rather outdated notion of a public-private split between male and female society.}\footnote{Judith Halberstam, \textit{Female Masculinity} (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 24.}
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For gender-ambiguous identities the uncomfortable experience of public bathrooms is one of the most problematic. Yet, this is equally applicable to "sexually-ambiguous" identities since mainstream society expects us to not only be visibly gendered and readable as female and feminine, but also heterosexual.

Halberstam articulates the public bathroom as a pseudo-domestic space of “enhanced femininity”, where gender is the primary enforced structure to suggest who is accepted and safe. For that reason, the public female bathroom is meant to be a safe female-only space, one of the few female-only spaces within the public sphere. If gender-ambiguous lesbians are no longer perceived as allies to heterosexual women in their unreadable femininity and anti-normative sexuality, then their presence within a female-only space is compromised, questioned and punished. They are no longer welcome, but feared and resented, similar to if a man had entered. Halberstam goes on to suggest that:

\footnote{Halberstam, \textit{Female Masculinity}, 24.}
in these bathroom confrontations, the gender-ambiguous person first appears as not-woman (“You are in the wrong bathroom!”), but then the person appears as something actually even more scary, not-man (“No, I am not,” spoken in a voice recognized as not-male). Not-man and not-woman, the gender-ambiguous bathroom user is also not androgynous or in-between; this person is gender deviant.”

I believe this is likewise fitting of the “homofeminine” lesbian. Within her “passing”, she is the woman-not-woman, dismantling the supposed synonymous relationship between gender and sexuality. Her “passing” is both the reason she is seen as a non-threat and threat, depending on whether her sexuality remains invisible or not.

Subsequently, the “homofeminine” lesbian is located within the intersectionality of a quieter, more sinuous homophobia of how femininity should align with heterosexuality, which is equally interlaced with a misogynistic sexism towards femininity and women as a whole. Yet, this homophobia is subtly articulated by heterosexual women and lesbians alike who either perceive femininity as a privileged gender for heterosexual women or a negatively, inauthentic gender for lesbians where hierarchies of power within lesbian communities denote femininity to a synonymous relationship with heterosexuality. Within Homophobia: A History (2000), Bryne Fone suggests varying types of prejudice that connote homophobia stating that, “those who suffer from narcissistic prejudice “cannot tolerate the idea that there exist people who are not like them.” This functions greatly with regard to the lesbophobic relationship between “butch” lesbians and heterosexual women, yet the “homofeminine” I argue creates the reverse prejudice, making heterosexual women face the notion that there exists people who are like them, in the same spaces, but still different. The “homofeminine” lesbian is too similar when gazed upon by the heterosexual woman who can identify with her. When this similarity is exposed as a “façade,” the “homofeminine” lesbian identity creates a rupture in the synonymous relationship of women exhibiting femininity equalling a heterosexual orientation, which arguably forces heterosexual women to confront their own feminine performances, gazes and the stability of their labels that position their identities within heterosexual society.

Whilst it may be argued that unintelligibility can lead to experiences of fear of violence, insults and ostracism, particularly in spaces which elicit strict gendering regulations and enforcements, I argue that there is not just one set of social norms or constructs that a body can comply with and therefore measure their intelligibility against. Nowadays, I believe we must recognise the diversity of social norms continually affecting a body. Not only has the repetitive performance of mainstream patriarchal and heterosexual gender; sex and sexuality norms instilled notions of what is normative within us, but the repetitive utterance of butch, femme, drag, camp, transsexual and transgender identities has arguably generated alternative norms; more recognisable identities with certain behaviours, signifiers and constructs. Whilst these may still be considered anti-normative, they are nonetheless intelligible identities in certain spaces and communities; therefore, one can argue that various LGBTQ communities have generated their own notions of

8 Halberstam, Female Masculinity, 21.
normativity and created alternative intelligible identities within these communities. For example, the reverse appropriation of gender aesthetics occurs within lesbian communities in which the butch is a female’s norm and the “homofeminine” lesbian is arguably ambiguous within her androgynous “in-between” state, whilst the femme is often labelled as “fake” or “inauthentic”. Therefore, whilst the butch identity may remain unrecognisable or less intelligible within mainstream society, its repetitive utterance as a lesbian identity has nonetheless produced butch identities as recognisable, intelligible identities within the space of lesbian communities.

Consequently, when considering the question of what makes an identity intelligible, one must also ask – in what situation? In what community? By whose constructs, recognitions and standards? Minority cultures have generated, performatively entrenched and normalised their own normative constructs, in which various markers of desirability and aesthetics signify a body’s inclusion within their respective contexts, adding to a further struggle for visibility and recognition within marginal sexualities for those who do not “fit” the generated norms created by these communities. If norms are considered to be regulated spatially and temporally by varying cultures and communities, then one can begin to understand the “homofeminine” lesbian like Sally Munt’s lesbian flâneur, trespassing the borders of sexual geographies without fully inhabiting or settling anywhere, nomadic and continuously misrecognised wherever she goes. For the “homofeminine” lesbian, her aesthetic similarity to a heterosexual, feminine woman arguably makes her less intelligible, through continuous misrecognition as belonging where she herself does not want to belong. Consequently, highlighting the multitude of (un)intelligible bodies may be beneficial to critiquing the terms of what is considered intelligible, whereby an identity, such as the “homofeminine” lesbian, could hold positive possibilities of change by demonstrating the incoherence of gender and sexuality alignments from a position of “similarity,” rather than difference. By doing so, this could potentially establish the need for more inclusive modes of intelligibility or at least broader understandings of what is intelligible.

If the way in which discourses of power and knowledge interplay is deliberated upon in similar contexts to Butler’s consideration of their relationship, whereby:

The question of who and what is considered real and true is apparently a question of knowledge. But it is also, as Michel Foucault makes plain, a question of power. Having or bearing “truth” and “reality” is an enormously powerful prerogative within the social world, one way that power dissimulates as ontology.

Then perhaps the continual theorising of the Other in opposition to the norm needs to consider an alternative route, one that desists legitimising the same mechanisms it desires to dismantle. What was once subversive in its classification as Other and challenging to social norms has now arguably become naturalised through discourses of power and knowledge of this Otherness. The growing visibility of varying minority cultures and communities means that they have generated their own social norms, constructs and modes of identity that signify a body’s inclusion

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11 Butler, Undoing Gender, 27.
within certain contexts, even if this signification may be classified as Otherness to mainstream social norms.

Although Butler argues for the necessity to track the breaking points of the field of intelligibility, to meet its discontinuities and points of failure, where the site of intelligibility cannot be constituted, 12 I believe this must be expanded upon to address the way in which the Other no longer necessarily tracks the discontinuities of intelligibility, because it continues to uphold societal expectations and norms simply by being the comparison to the normative, where anti-normative identities have become naturalised to an extent in their own acknowledged categories. Therefore, rather than exploring these identities with notions of difference and Otherness, perhaps we should look to track these border-treading identities from notions of sameness, to challenge the normative breaking points or discontinuities within their own constructs and what this means in relation to intelligibility.

The “homofeminine” lesbian is a spatial flâneur, tightrope walking the borders of different communities, neither intelligible nor unintelligible, but never truly belonging. The context in which the body is situated, as well as the affect of spatial, temporal and human bodies upon the self, continuously problematises normative constructs of gender, sex and sexuality. Although the performance of gender is not static or a presupposed identity, but generated through daily actions, arguably these utterances rely upon social contexts that are not necessarily homogenous to heterosexual, patriarchal society, but to the community one desires recognition and livability within. The “homofeminine” lesbian, as an identity misrecognised and ultimately invisible to certain gazes, assists in demonstrating the complexity of intelligibility and how vast the grey area between intelligible/unintelligible and recognised/unrecognised is when negotiating diverse cultures and communities, which highlight that society and social norms are themselves continually altering depending on the performative utterances of identities.

The approach to intelligibility requires greater elasticity to reflect diversity, recognising border-treading identities of (un)intelligibility that highlight discontinuities within the very constructs of sex, sexuality and gender norms. Whilst this paper is by no means an exhaustive study, I hope it provides a starting point for further discussion on the way in which “similarity” and the rupturing of assumed gender and sexual orientation alignments in regards to the “homofeminine” lesbian could facilitate the undermining of synonymous relationships between gender, sex and sexuality, which have not only been naturalised in heterosexual society, but also LGBTQ communities. Ultimately, since no-one truly embodies society’s normative constructs, we should highlight how the normative is as varied as the anti-normative, creating a more inclusive, diverse and less presumptuous intelligibility of identities, where aesthetic markers of stereotypical or normative gender, sex and sexual subjectivities are no longer heavily relied upon. Butler reflects upon the power of certain identities, such as drag, and how they enter into the political field:

They make us not only question what is real, and what “must” be, but they also show us how the norms that govern contemporary notions of reality can be questioned and how new modes of reality can become instituted. These practices of instituting new modes of

12 Butler, Undoing Gender, 215-216.
reality take place in part through the scene of embodiment, where the body is not understood as a static and accomplished face, but as an aging process, a mode of becoming that, in becoming otherwise, exceeds the norm, reworks the norm, and makes us see how realities to which we thought we were confined are not written in stone.  

The “homofeminine” lesbian as an in-between or more androgynous mode of feminine lesbian produces a similar affect, albeit in more elusive terms, in which the norms are not questioned by comparatively highlighting differences or Otherness, but by exposing the very mechanisms that apparently produce such social norms as deficient and incomplete. Ultimately, through greater visibility and recognition of (un)intelligible identities as scenes of lived embodiment on the borders of varying cultures, perhaps these bodies, always in the mode of becoming, will not only generate new modes of reality, but highlight how society’s current modes of reality are already questionable, already unable to confine to us in written stone.

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Adorned Shadows and Rebellious Tropes in Jan Švankmajer’s Alice

Mareike Sera

Abstract

This essay aims to trace subversive pleasures in Jan Švankmajer’s Alice (Něco z Alenky, 1988) and their revolutionary potential residing within densely saturated atmospheres of aesthetic expression. It will be explored, how poetic-analytical notions such as ‘adorned shadows’ and ‘subversive pleasures’ serve to describe expressive dramas and intensities and how their very material as well as abstract nature facilitates the possibility of social and political change. In order to elaborate this claim, the paper will draw extensively on Antonin Artaud’s ‘metaphysics of expression,’ Paul Ricœur’s notion of mimesis, Vivian Sobchack’s view on interobjectivity and Gilles Deleuze’s conception of the event. The approach is experimental. Poetic and analytical language inspire each other to unfold and indulge within, in between, on / of the powerlessness to think and the fragility of sense – an erotics of interpretation toward the expressible and expressed in Švankmajer’s remarkable interpretation of Lewis Carroll’s Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland.

Introduction

To write is certainly not to impose a form (of expression) on the matter of lived experience.  

Jan Švankmajer’s well-known Alice (also known as Something from Alice, Něco z Alenky, 1988, 84 min.) is all about language, about expression. Cinematic, theatrical, literary, pictorial, sensual languages merge endlessly and restlessly into one another, flaring up and taking down curved and flattened cascades of meaning and architectures of desire. This is true for most of the director’s fascinating work, whose language is ‘weak’, born out of the desire for the powerlessness and inferiority of thought, looking subtly for a way out of the unbearable.

Švankmajer’s films do not ‘impose’ language, expression and meaning. They unearth expression, carve it out, draw it out of lived and livable experience – lure it, hide it, fail it. The cinematic language of Alice moves obsessively, erratically, aberrantly – from behind / beneath primordial, ritualised grounds – through the rhythmic, fragmented, embodied, passionate breath of expression and desire – towards the fragile, aloft planes of sense and thought (see Picture 9, ‘Planes’).


2 Language is understood here hermeneutic-phenomenologically, supposing expression as bordering symbolically on experience. The construction and deconstruction of meaning (hermeneutics) is motivated by the epistemological desire to (self) knowledge and enfolded and obliterated in the embodied experience of lived and livable experience (phenomenology). Language is always already given in experience, even if this experience is ambiguous, giving rise to interpretation. “One speaks a language that is never fully one’s own [...] [L]anguage gains its temporal life only in and through the utterances that reinvoke and restructure the conditions of its own possibility” Judith Butler, Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative (London: Routledge, 1997), 140. See also Don Ihde, Hermeneutic Phenomenology: The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1971).

Alice’s journey in the film re-traces this erratic movement between deep levels of folded, ritualised, masochistic pains and pleasures, to cracked surfaces of sense making processes – moments of powerlessness of thought tempting with the fragility of sense. Is it possible to tentatively move towards these textures in the film text? Any film analytical approach might do that. Yet, this reading would like to propose an experimental approach. What happens if you merge lyrical and analytical language, presupposing that poetic language might produce different resonances and fragile meanings as analytical (im-)positions? While the analytical approach highlights the quest for (self-)knowledge, the lyrical advance emphasises resonances in the aberrations, excesses, failures and deviations. As Susan Sontag famously asserts in Against Interpretation, cinema appears to be the art form most alive and exciting for the “latitude it gives for making mistakes […], and still being good.”\(^4\) Thus, good film criticism implies, on Sontag’s account:

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\text{T}o \text{ recover our senses. We must learn to see more, to hear more, to feel more. Our task is not to find the maximum amount of content in a work of art, much less to squeeze more content out of the work than is already there. Our task is to cut back content so that we can see the thing at all.}^5
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Merging lyrical with analytical language intends to move towards such a recovery of senses, a recovery that culminates in eroticism: “In place of hermeneutics we need an erotics of art.”\(^6\) To do this, erotics and hermeneutics are explored in dialectical tension to each other, as the fragility of sense and thought seem central to Švankmajer’s Alice. This reading does not offer and secure (descriptive) contents, but proposes weakened, falsified, denigrated contents, irritated and possessed in eroticised content: weakened sense.\(^7\)

A collage of pictorial, literary and lyrical views is offered (text fragments, pictures and poems seaming, besieging, and invading the analytical body of the text) that intends to address and resonate with the ritualised, erotised, passionate aspect of the fragility of sense of Alice. Respectively, the analytic-epistemological side engages with weakened concepts of theory: of theoretical approaches that understand languages and terms innately as subject to ‘falsehood’ and ‘becoming.’\(^8\) The work

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5 Ibid., 14.
6 Ibid.
7 Propose, possess, and offer – much used analytical phrases – resonate strongly in this dialogue between lyrical and analytical language. The fragility of sense becomes quite palpable in relation to these terms, as will become clear.
of Gilles Deleuze comes to mind, but also the writings of Antonin Artaud (theatre of cruelty), Paul Ricoeur (mimesis) and Vivian Sobchack (interobjectivity) will be referred to in this context.

Fragile sense(s): sense and erotics

Poetic / analytical terms – indefinitely folding and folded within and by / of the ever erratic, erring movements of transformation and translation of the film – take the centre-stage in this:

- adorned shadows
- irrational concrete
- grotesque beauty
- material ghosts
- fragile sense
- symbolic aggression
- subversive pleasures.

The list is by no means exhaustive and it will not be possible to discuss all of the terms in depth. This should be done elsewhere, especially in relation to the rich historical and cultural implications of these terms. Here, the emphasis lies on the first and the last, as the title of the paper suggests – adorned shadows and subversive pleasure – leaving the others to resonate and fold in between, within and by / of the saturated atmosphere of the film and its discussion.

Why these terms, where do they come from? Is it their paradoxical bearing, drawing together the unthinkable and the unbearable? Is it the poetic / symbolic depth that they hold and fail? This is certainly the case. As Denkfiguren, figures of thought, they resonate in between, within and on / of a variety of artistic and critical subtexts – indefinitely folding scenes, gestures, acts, scenarios, etc. into one another. They map out subtle dramas and conflicts, which are deeply erotic and meaningful in a fragile sense – destructive and healing, regressive and predicative, unknown and familiar.  

Antonin Artaud
Preface
Every real effigy has a shadow which is its double; and art must falter and fail from the moment the sculptor believes he has liberated the kind of shadow whose very existence will destroy his repose.

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9 The historical and cultural context in mind refers to the artistic and critical legacy of Surrealism and Dada, especially French and Czech traditions. Other points of reference might include vaudeville, commedia dell’arte, and puppet theatre, as much as radical philosophy and political-artistic activism.

To understand such figures of thought means to understand the conflict that rages in between, within and on / of them; or at least try to understand it. You must not simply give in to the passion, though this is the most important first step in, eroticise your thinking. You must not simply subdue to their destructive and healing ‘weak’ force, in order to expel and exorcise the demons and touch their improbable souls – masochistic pleasures and pains.

In order to understand the fragility of sense, you turn to the effects of the attributes, stirring and touching the unbearable souls of the substantives: adorned shadows, irrational concrete, grotesque beauty, material ghosts, fragile sense, symbolic aggression, subversive pleasures, etc. The intolerable ‘substance’ is exorcised (regression, destruction) and lured onto new grounds (healing, predication). In between, within and on / of this stirring and touching of attributes something amazing happens (event), utterly erotic and meaningful at the same time. As Deleuze points out in The Logic of Sense, the attributes are very different to the actions and passions of the body, but they most importantly draw attention to the causes and effects, happening in between, within and on / of them, drawing sense and passion indefinitely together (drama / fragility of sense):

The fragility of sense can easily be explained. The attribute has an entirely different nature than the actions and passions of the body. But it results from them, since sense is the effect of corporal causes and their mixture.

Sense is tied to the actions and passions of the body, subdued to their mixture and bearing in terms of cause and effect. The working of meaning through the actions and passions of the body – subduing it to the body’s dramas, conflicts, sorrows, failures, pains, desires, sickness, pleasures, joys, healing – marks it palpably fragile, effaces its surfaces, folds it, encloses it, sieves it through, swallows it, batters it, fails it. We want to understand the drama in between, within and on / of the figures of expression, their origins and bearings, their destructive forcefulness and healing tenderness, their passionate rebellion and sickening exhaustion – all between the effaced surfaces of the body and the collapsed surfaces of sense.

**Symbolic aggression: the powerlessness to think**

Fragile sense or ‘weak’ meaning that reaches between the effaced surface of the body and the collapsed surface of sense looks for cause and effect relation, but in a re-discovered, re-newed sense: a re-sensualised, re-eroticised sense that passionately dynamic spacio-temporal determinations, that are pre-qualitative and pre-extensive, taking “place” in intensive systems where differences are distributed at different depth, whose patients are larval subjects and whose “function” is to actualize Ideas….

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falls back onto bodies and mingles with their sonorous elements, with the body’s olfactory, gustatory and digestive affects. Švankmajer’s version of Alice excessively draws on this tension between collapsed surface and passionately falling back onto the schizophrenic body. Alice continuously changes her appearance and size, rapidly moving between a puppet body and the body of a little girl:

As there is no surface, the inside and the outside, the container and the contained no longer have a precise limit [...]. Hence, the schizophrenic manner of living the contradiction: either in the deep fissure, which traverses the body, or in the fragmented parts, which encase one another and spin about. Body sieve, fragmented body and dissociated body – these are the three primary dimensions of the schizophrenic body.

With the collapse of the surface, meaning is lost. However in this, the vague idea of a ‘shared thought’ or rather a ‘shared’ approach to ‘thought’ presses through: the powerlessness to think. This paradox is quite palpable in Alice. Expression violently imprints on the matter of lived experience, without ever touching it. Thought emphatically presses and transforms through countless forms, figures, metaphors, plots, shapes, without ever really adopting any. The film presents a cinematic as a literary, a dramatic as a pictorial / tactile homage to Lewis Carroll’s Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, tentatively reckoning with its strange and beautiful characters and breath-taking world of wonders: a world of expressive and excessive becoming.

Peter Hames points out:

The original title of the film, Something from Alice, indicates that the film was never intended as an ‘adaptation’ of the novel but is an interpretation ‘fermented’ by his own childhood ‘with all its particular obsessions and anxieties’.

The process of expressive / excessive ‘fermentation’ or indeed, translation, subdues the means, characters and settings of the original story to a series of symbolic acts of aggression (effacing the surface, collage, submerged in / on / of the faceless, schizophrenic body) that renders Švankmajer’s version obsessively violent. Alice’s surreal dream encounters with White Rabbit, Frog Footman, the Hatter, the March Hare and the Caterpillar are explicitly more threatening in Švankmajer’s version and this violence harks back, as Hames emphasises, to childhood memories and the expressiveness of early films.

Yet, there is more to it. The infuriating succession (surface) of symbolic acts of violence (depth) does not simply reflect on the filmmaker’s personal life, his memories and experiences, investing regrettably the film’s language with psychoanalytic and pathologic subtexts. While it is certainly true that the expressivity of the film replicates the personal neurotic and schizophrenic obsessions of Švankmajer, with

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12 Ibid., 91.
13 Ibid., 87.
14 Peter Hames, Czech and Slovak Cinema. Theme and Tradition (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 179.
manifold references to perverted food and excessive tactility,\(^{15}\) regression is not the sole driving force of the film’s expressivity:

The symbolic aggression is, according to Švankmajer’s own admission, a form of protection, a cathartic and ritual ceremony, charged with distancing the demons, internal fears and intimate terrors (which are often substrata coming from childhood) and seeking to master them by externalising and naming them. But this conflict in its symbolic forms goes beyond a simple return of the repressed and latches onto more universal plays of forces and energies that also need to be known, named and mastered.\(^{16}\)

The re-enactment of intimate conflicts and dramas in *Alice* reaches beyond personal feelings and experiences. Becoming aware of the symbolic dimension of intimate dramas opens the eyes and senses towards primordial, initial, mythological conflicts that move in / through symbolic acts of violence: acts of breaking away radically.

Nobody understood this better than Antonin Artaud. For Artaud, the ‘metaphysics’ of expression implies re-tracing and re-enacting symbolic acts of violence that give way to concrete, re-sensualised forms of expression. As Artaud describes the experience of a fire in a painting in *Metaphysics and the Mise en Scene*:

There is [...] something frighteningly energetic and troubling in the way the painter depicts this fire, like an element still active and in motion, yet with an immobilized expression. It matters little how this effect is obtained, it is real; it is enough to see the canvas to be convinced of it.\(^{17}\)

This fire is a shadow of its own, yet, as it is able to convince the canvas of its destructive nature, it acts destructive and troubling in a very real, fragile sense. How this impression is enforced on the canvas / viewer matters little (in terms of means). The persuasiveness (hermeneutics) lies within and on / of the painterly expressiveness of the scene (phenomenology), expelling a concrete, sensual language beyond conventional language, a language of shadows:

‘For the theatre as for culture, the question remains that of naming and directing shadows.’ These forces in conflict, these shadows are equally those that govern, act, transform

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and destroy the world. In this way the opposition and confrontation [...] of the universe are re-enacted through the intimate conflicts and unconscious dramas which, under another form [...] mark individuals.\textsuperscript{18}

The cosmic and the personal conjoin in symbolic textures and knowledges of conflict, exposing ever changing fragilities of sense(s). Banned and exorcised between consuming depth and fleeting farce, the vague and unrelenting idea of the inferiority and powerlessness to ‘think’ presses to the fore, cast as shadows to escape language. Deleuze draws to this in \textit{Cinema II}:

\begin{quote}
It might be said that Artaud turns round Eisenstein’s argument: if it is true that thought depends on a shock which gives birth to it (the nerve, the brain matter), it can only think one thing, \textit{the fact that we are not yet thinking}, the powerlessness to think the whole and to think oneself, thought which is always fossilized, dislocated, collapsed. [Emphasis G.D.\textsuperscript{19}]
\end{quote}

\textbf{Dealing with the Unbearable}

Bringing out the powerlessness of thought (language and expression) means drawing out the power of the false, of \textit{becoming}: the invisible, dream, perversion, childhood, madness, etc. Thought is confronted with its own limit, therein initiating unstable zones of interstices, of rites and passage, of erring and derivation, of a subtle way out. The languages of madness and of perversion enable to “open up a kind of foreign language,”\textsuperscript{20} to create a “non-language (violence that does not speak, eroticism that remains unspoken).”\textsuperscript{21}

These visions are not fantasies, but veritable Ideas that the writer sees and hears in the interstices of language, in its intervals. They are not interruptions of the process but breaks that form part of it, like an eternity that can only be revealed in becoming, or a landscape that only appears in movement.\textsuperscript{22}

The powerlessness of language not simply disrupts power structures, but reveals in the moments of dissociation and dispossession of these languages distanciations of the world and of the self; a way out, a vision that the artist and writer as ‘seer’ is able to draw out in the interstices of language – the unthinkable in thought:

\begin{quote}
For it is not in the name of a better or truer world that thought captures the intolerable in this world, but, on the contrary, it is because this world is intolerable that it can no longer think a world or think itself. The intolerable is
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{18} Schmitt, “Return to origins,” 26.
\textsuperscript{19} Deleuze, \textit{Cinema 2}, 167.
\textsuperscript{20} Deleuze, Smith & Greco, “Literature and Life,” 230.
\textsuperscript{22} Deleuze, Smith & Greco, “Literature and Life,” 230.
no longer a serious injustice, but the permanent state of
daily banality.23

Reading Švankmajer’s *Alice* through terms like adorned shadows and subversive pleasures – to read it through / in the interstices of analytical and poetic languages – aims to engage with the film through the prism of ritualised and symbolic dispossessions and dissociations, distanciations of languages, the world, the self – to intimately touch the film’s text in disconcerting expressions of madness and perversion, drawing out the unthinkable and dealing with the unbearable:

To believe, not in a different world, but in a link between man and the world, in love of life, to believe in this as in the impossible, the unthinkable, which none the less cannot but be thought: something possible, otherwise I will suffocate.24

The belief in the power of the false puts the writer and artist in touch with life, with symbolic knowledges of conflict, with the identity of life and thought itself, not in a strong, but a ‘weak’ and ‘fragile’ sense. Where everything tumbles, everything trembles. Moving toward the powerlessness of thought means to move toward the power of falsehood, of weakness, of fragility, of exhaustion, of failure, of inferiority, of delicacy, of intricacy, of desire. Moving toward the inferiority of thought means to move toward erotics, toward the re-sensualisation of the body, toward the re-discovery of ritualised and symbolic knowledges. The intimate impulse ‘to flip’, ‘to move’ is, indeed, essentially linked to the will to understand, to breathe, to live, to believe – not in order to re-install an all-powerful thought or to re-instate language in a conventional sense, but to explore and discover life and thought through the mad, childish, and perverse joy of dispossessing and disassociating from language and expression. The writer and artist “has seen and heard of things too big for him, too strong for him, suffocating things whose passage exhausts him while nonetheless giving him the becoming that dominant and substantial health [language] would render impossible.”25 Psychoanalysing and pathologising instances and impulses of ‘perversion’ and ‘madness’ in artistic expression essentially misses the point. Interlacing analytical and poetic language intends to move closer towards this passage and its intimate understanding of life and thought inside / outside thought – the fragility of sense.

**Adorned Shadows in Alice**

Thus, where does the fragility of sense lead us in Švankmajer’s *Alice*? The adorned shadows? The violent acts of symbolic aggression? The ever changing surfaces of the collage, split open to embrace the unbearable? The unsettling and funny creatures that Alice encounters in Wonderland are, indeed, reminiscent of adorned shadows: the stuffed White Rabbit, coming to life, dressed in Renaissance style cloth, constantly losing sawdust, restlessly looking at its waistcoat watch, repeatedly mumbling “Oh dear, Oh dear, I’m going to be late!” and carrying a huge pair of scissors; or the rabbit’s scull-headed entourage, chimeric reptile, fish and bird-like creatures, dressed like the rabbit in beautiful red gowns (see picture 1-3). Later the same

23 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 170.
24 Ibid.
25 Deleuze, Smith & Greco, “*Literature and Life*” 228.
creatures attack Alice, when she intrudes into the rabbit’s house, and punish her by entrapping her in a puppet shaped casket. The rabbit and the chimeric creatures drag her in this demeaning device to a pantry. She starts exploring the food around her: marmalade with pins and bread rolls with nails (see picture 4), perverted food that Alice already had encountered during her fall down the rabbit hole (in Švankmajer’s version an elevator trip down to Wonderland). Similarly puzzling and amusing are Frog Footman, the Hatter, the March Hare and the Caterpillar (see pictures 5-8). The glass eyes that equip most of the creatures endow them with human likeness, albeit grotesquely estranged. The bizarre appearance and mad behaviour of the characters is hostile, dismissive and violent, but also likable and enthusing in the very fact of strangeness. The frenzy of the tea party, for example, is irritating and fascinating, with the tea running down the puppet’s body, as the tea is impossible to ingest for a puppet, the repeated outcry of the Hatter: “I want a clean cup, let’s all move round one place!!”, a fur licking the tea service clean (the fur representing the Dormouse), or the March Hare coating the Hatter’s waistcoat watch with butter. We witness this frenzy with utter amazement and bewilderment and are enthused and appalled by its repetitive patterns and overwhelming strangeness. The same is true for Švankmajer’s remarkable interpretation of the Caterpillar (see picture 8). When Alice enters the room, she first encounters wormlike sock-creatures punching holes into the wooden floor. The Caterpillar himself is a sock-creature, too, resting next to a sewing basket. The mushroom he sits on is made of wood. Caterpillar will give two pieces of the mushroom to Alice and explains to her how to use them. This empowers Alice to control her ability to grow and shrink, though she has to eat the wooden pieces in order to obtain this ability. Indeed, the fantastic implications are undercut by the very everydayness of the things and actions involved. These everyday items and actions are invested with a magical, almost anarchic energy: the worm-like creatures that appear and disappear at will and punch the floor...
until there is nearly no room left, or the needle and thread that stitch up the eyes of the Caterpillar when he wants to rest. There is something very unsettling about this stitching.

Watching Švankmajer’s *Alice* means to get absorbed in an atmosphere of suffocation, suspense and breathless wonder. Speaking of adorned shadows in relation to the strange, mad creatures like White Rabbit, Frog Footman, the Hatter, the March Hare and the Caterpillar in *Alice* aims precisely to express this grotesque and bizarre nature of Wonderland: aspiring, deepening, disassociating, and erotising the ever passing and changing surfaces and bodies – abstracting, critically engaging, demeaning, traversing, transcending, collaging – regressing, violently processing, splitting open, pressing through, deepening, furthering, dissociating, collapsing, fragmenting. The adornments, such as the elaborate means of carving, dressing, filming, and arranging (attributes), are means of embellishment, testimonies of careful attention to detail and craftsmanship. Yet, the paint is flaky, the carving outworn, the dress battered: surface split open, effaced and worn beauties. The adornments draw attention to the material side “between grammar and prosody” the here and now of the carnal experience of the ‘presence’ of the shadows and the effects of their actions. They draw attention to the sensibility articulated through rhetorical means – a rhetoric between enthused awe and suffocated will.

**Mimesis**

Paul Ricœur’s notion of mimesis is very interesting in this respect. Ricœur makes it clear that the notion of imitation in art always already highlights the constructed nature of artistic expression in that it draws attention to the distinct character of art and nature. However, this discrepancy does not justify the semiotic attempt to differentiate an *inside* and an *outside* of artistic expression, as in a practical prefiguration and a practical transfiguration. Representation stresses in the mimetic means its constructed and composed nature and challenges in this any attempt to draw a (semiotic) line between a secluded inside (text) and an excluded outside (world). In exploring the very means and characters of adornment in *Alice*, in studying the carnal sensibilities raised by the material side and, at the same time, accounting for the trans-material, chimeric side in between grammars, rhetorics, rhythms, prosodies, emotions, myths and intentions of these means of adornment, is to engage hermeneutically with the collapsed distinction between *inside* and *outside*, between text and world. As Ricœur writes:

> It is the task of hermeneutics [...] to reconstruct the set of operations by means of which a work rises from the opaque depth of living, acting, suffering, to be given by an author to readers who receive it and thereby change their own actions.27

Dealing with the adorned shadows of *Alice* means addressing the disrupted, collapsed ‘line’ between inside and outside, between reality and dream, between language and the powerlessness to think – how both are nonetheless and still linked in the unbearable impossibility to think and live. Embodied perception meeting

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27 Ibid, 17.
hermeneutics in order to re-trace and re-discover fragile sense(s), delicate linkages and vital bonds that make believe and want that there is something to live and breathe for in the unbearable: interstices conjoining sense and body, signum and res, thought and passion. These ‘delicate links’ and ‘vital bonds’ are both known and new to symbolic knowledges – shared or to be discovered in between, within, on/of the symbolic dramas of bodily action and passion – in between, within, on/of effaced surfaces and faceless bodies mixing passionately together – poetically/symbolically re-enacted knowledge.

**Interobjectivity**

The bread rolls with nails in *Alice* (Picture 4) present a ‘weak’ example in this respect, which resonates with the body as much as it does with language. On one level, we make fleshly, bodily sense of this image. Being at the same time edible and inconsumable, the thought of another body actually enduring and desiring ingestion of this adorned object results in an awkward perception tainted by masochistic pleasure and displeasure. This kind of embodied perception, which draws on the (imaginary) bodily exchange between objects and projects, actualises both in the materiality and sense-ability of their shared carnal perception. Vivian Sobchack terms this reversibility inter-objectivity. As Sobchack writes:

> What I am here calling interobjectivity is also grounded in the “anonymous existence” and reversibility of the flesh – but its structure is experienced in a mode both complementary and contrary to intersubjectivity. That is, interobjectivity connects us as we anonymously exist with the common matter and potential of materiality that is mutually shared not only by intentional subjects but also by nonintentional objects.28

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Interobjectively, we engage with the materiality and sense-ability of the object world by projecting “our sense of what it feels like to be objective.” Sobchack makes it quite clear that it is impossible for us to perceive the object-body in-itself, but rather for-itself. In moments, in which we experience objects as non-intentional and indifferent to subjective sense-ability, we rather appear to be understanding that the real and present presence of an object is beyond our means of comprehension. Sensing terms of opacity, inertia and indifference associated with the presence of the object world, we really sense “its preobjective status as real, a sense of a presence that is undifferentiated for us in its materiality – that is not yet an object and not yet a subject.” This pre-symbolic, pre-objective engagement with the material and objective side enables us to perceive others and the world aesthetically and ethically. Sobchack differentiates in this respect suffering and devotion. Passion defined as suffering comprises, according to Sobchack’s view, the capacity of being acted upon. In this, subjects and objects share the ‘material base’ that makes them vulnerable and susceptible to external forces. This shared experience of ‘being essentially material’ that is foregrounded in suffering, interlocks subjective and objective modes of existence and highlights ethical perceptions. As Sobchack writes:

> It is this sense of passion as suffering the agency and power of external forces on our lived bodies that provides us the material foundation that primordially grounds the possibility of our ethical behaviour to others and the world. That is, the passion of suffering not only forces recognition of oneself as an objective subject always immanently and substantially “here” and open to being externally acted on regardless of one’s volition – but it also enhances the awareness of oneself as a subjective object: a material being that is nonetheless capable of feeling what it is to be treated only as an object.

In other words, highlighting the awareness of ‘being material’ in the acted upon objective body raises the material and ethical sensibility of the subjective body and interlocks it in the experience of suffering with the objective body. The sequence of stitching up the eyes, when Caterpillar rests, serves as a clear example in this respect. The appalling / enthusing feeling that emerges with this unsettling scene mirrors the thought of an acted upon objective body and the viewer feeling with it and interlocking with it.

This idea of projective exteriorisation that implies ‘becoming’ an object by engaging with it, is even stronger with the notion of devotion, the complementary aspect of suffering. In relation to this, Sobchack writes:

> On the other hand, passion is also defined as an active devotion to others and the objective world, as an intense, driving, and overmastering feeling that emerges and expands beyond our conscious will yet acts on us, nonetheless, from within. Thus,

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29 Ibid., 316.
30 Ibid., 315.
31 Ibid., 288.
like suffering, passionate devotion is in excess of our volition; but unlike suffering, it is within our agency.32

The passionate aspect of devotion, thus, describes the desire and obsession to self-transform, to enfold, embrace, and displace the other subject’s and object’s materiality and objectivity in acts of intimacy and transformation, aiming to make the other’s alterity one’s own. The driving force of devotion is care and appreciation of the other’s materiality and objectivity. It aims at sensual and sensible expansion, to broaden the appreciative and caring perception of the world. By acting on and enfolding the other’s and the world’s materiality with our own through our senses and with feeling, we get intimately engaged with “our primordial, pre-reflective, and material sense-ability – the general understanding of which becomes reflectively and actively re-cognized in conscious as that particular aesthetic concept we call sensibility.”33

Events, corporal dramas and destinies.

In The Logic of Sense Deleuze distinguishes between the event and the action/passion, the non-consumable and the edible, the incorporeal and the substantial, the shallow and the deep:

Humpty Dumpty opposes the impassibility of events to the actions and passions of bodies, the non-consumable nature of sense to the edible nature of things, the impenetrability of incorporeal entities without thickness to the mixtures of reciprocal penetrations of substances, and the resistance of the surface to the softness of the depth – in short, the “pride” of the verbs to the complacency of substantives and adjectives. Impenetrability means the frontier between the two – and that the person situated on the frontier, precisely as Humpty Dumpty is seated on his narrow wall, has both at his disposal, being the impenetrable master of the articulation of difference (“however, I can manage the whole lot of them”).34

Humpty Dumpty knows how to conjoin the two realms, as he is aware of the line of demarcation between the two. He (as symbolic texture / figure) stands in for the paradoxical proposition of conjoining and disjoining the two realms. Thus, what does the proposition tell us? The substantial and the insubstantial side are invariably distinct, but they bear on each other in taking effect within, in between, on / of each other (differentiating, intensifying, particularising, permeating, dramatizing, etc.).

According to Sean Bowden’s reading of Deleuze’s The Logic of Sense, the notion of the event refers, indeed, to the effects of passion and action, to the result brought about by corporeal actions and passions.35 In relation to the event, the sensual experience is projected onto a metaphysical surface that is irreducible to the physical extension

32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., 290.
34 Deleuze, The Logic of Sense, 25.
What is more intimate or essential to bodies than events such as growing, becoming smaller or being cut? [...] But what we mean by “to grow,” “to diminish,” “to become red,” “to become green,” “to cut,” “to be cut,” etc. is something entirely different. These are no longer states of affairs – mixtures deep inside bodies – but incorporeal events at the surface which are the result of these mixtures.

Not only that the corporeal (adornment) is related to the incorporeal (shadow) in terms of effect-relations – “infinitely divisible and temporal event-effects” organising and differentiating pre-qualitative and pre-extensive “the physical cosmic present” – it also relates in sense-effects, “that is, to the kinds of effects produced by bringing language to bear upon itself.” The event bears on the states of affairs in language (attributes), but it also reflects on language in the process of ‘becoming’ (proposition):

Sense is both the expressible or the expressed of the proposition, and the attribute of the state of affairs. It turns one side towards things and one side toward proposition. But it does not merge with the proposition which expresses it any more than with the state of affairs or the quality which the proposition denotes...[...] It is in this sense that it is an ‘event’: on the condition that the event is not confused with the spatio-temporal realisation in a state of affairs. We will not ask therefore what is the sense of the event: the event is sense itself.

Thus, the attribute ‘adorned’ in relation to ‘shadow’ relates to a state of affairs, but this relation describes an exteriority: event-effects that actualise and realise in Švankmajer’s interpretation, while implementing further possible realisations and actualisations in other interpretations. However, the realisation of event-effects within a particular state of affairs – the beautiful renaissance style gowns, the flaky paint, the outworn carving, etc. – does not exhaust the event’s bearing on

36 Deleuze, The Logic of Sense, 5f.
37 Bowden, The Priority of Events, 25.
38 Deleuze, The Logic of Sense, 22.
39 On the difference between actualisation and realisation see: Deleuze, “The Method of Dramatization,” 101: “The Idea is an image without resemblance; the virtual actualises itself not through resemblance, but through divergence and differentiation. Differentiation or actualization is always creative with respect to what it actualises, whereas realization is always reproductive or limiting. The difference between the virtual and the actual is no longer the difference of the Same insofar as the Same is posited once in representation, and once again outside representation. Rather it is the difference of the Other, insofar as the Other appears once in the Idea, and once again, though in a totally different manner, in the process of actualizing the Idea.”
Through the Looking-Glass, Lewis Carroll

‘When I use a word, Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less.’ ‘The question is,’ said Alice, ‘whether you can make words mean different things.’ ‘The question is,’ said Humpty Dumpty, ‘which is to be master – that’s all.’ Alice was too much puzzled to say anything, so after a minute Humpty Dumpty began again. ‘They have a temper, some of them – particularly verbs, they’re the proudest – adjectives you can do anything with, but not verbs – however, I can manage the whole lot! Impenetrability! That’s what I say!’

sense-relations. The sense emerging from event-effects is complemented by sense-effects that induce incorporeal propositions (‘adorned shadows’), that relate “causes to causes and places a bond of causes between them.”40 Event-effects and sense-effects interfuse and do not interfuse, resonating between symbol and experience, between body and idea. On this account, Deleuze speaks of ‘destiny’. As the sense-effects articulate ‘propositions’ to be distinguished from the spatio-temporal realisation, they articulate ‘quasi-relations’ that implement ‘destiny’. This is how sense-effects deal with the unbearable of the ‘shadow’, of the powerlessness to think. In reflecting on the ‘becoming’ of language, on the terms of the expressible and expression, sense-effects move toward the inside of sense, its intimacy and fragility, toward the unbearable, toward powerlessness.

The fragility of sense is therefore twofold: an exterior and an interior fragility. One essentially rooted in corporeal dramas, indefinite dramas of consumption, of actions and passions, of mixture, of intermingling, of mythic conflict, and regressive acts of (symbolic) violence (exterior); the other reflecting on incorporeal destinies, on terms of expression like rhythms, symbols, metaphors, guilt, ‘weak’ propositions longing for non-consumption, non-language, non-substantiality, non-essentiality, powerlessness (interior). As Bowden explicates “events are the ontological primitives from which everything else arises [...] it concerns ‘the ontological priority of events over substances’.”41 In Deleuze’s understanding the events provide the fundamental ontological category. The strong psychosexual and mythical implications in Švankmajer’s films clearly suggest an archaeological, genealogical reading that traces metaphors and symbols to their complex, ‘textured’ relation to fundamental ontological categories, to notions of guilt, evil and masochistic pleasures (exterior and interior fragility). The bread rolls with nails are a perfect example of masochistic connotations that abound in Švankmajer’s work and therefore strongly resonate with psychosexual implications. While the mythical connotations and their relation to guilt will be discussed elsewhere, the following part of the essay will focus on the revolutionary potential of masochistic imagery in relation to Alice on the basis of the notion of subversive pleasures.

Rebellious tropes in Alice

When Alice leaves the Caterpillar, who shared with her the knowledge and the means to control her ability to shrink

40 Deleuze, The Logic of Sense, 7.
and grow, Švankmajer’s Alice feels empowered to enter the realm of the flat, two-dimensional surfaces, the land of cards that is ruled by the Queen of Hearts and her continuous and impertinent outcry: “Chop off their heads!” (see picture 10).

In conjunction with this cruel command, we soon realise the purpose of the White Rabbit’s pair of scissors; to carry out the beheadings. He beheads card soldiers, Hatter and March Hare and other characters. In the final sequence, Alice gets tried and the Queen of Hearts continuously calls for her to be beheaded. The sequence ends with a passage or transition, shortly before the child wakes up: a number of superimpositions show the child’s head replaced by the heads of the grotesque characters. In terror, she slowly shakes her head.

When she wakes up, she finds that she has not been beheaded and sits in between the toys that figured in her dream and visit to Wonderland. However, the glass case, where the stuffed White Rabbit is supposed to be, is empty. Alice gets to the case and draws out a hidden drawer. She pulls out a pair of scissors and says: “He is late as usual, I think I will cut his head off!”

In this last image, Alice clearly assumes the power of the Queen of Hearts. As Deleuze points out in the _Logic of sense_, _Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland_ can be divided into three parts in relation to the schizophrenic tendency to efface and dissociate surfaces.42 Švankmajer’s version stresses this schizophrenic tendency. In contrast to the first part’s relation to regression, the second part represents a phase of transition, in which Alice gradually realises her power to choose between the world of regression and the world of abstraction. In the scene with the baby frenetically crying and throwing kitchenware out of the door and window of the Duchess’ house, Alice picks up the baby and finds, to her surprise, a piglet. The matter of choice for Alice in this scene seems to be between child and pig. During the Hatter’s and the March Hare’s tea party, she similarly appears to be able to choose between the artist, who deals with heads (Hatter) and the animal that lives in burrows (March Hare).43

Shortly after the tea party, Alice follows the White Rabbit up the stairs to the land of cards. The first thing, Alice witnesses there is a shadow play (adorned shadows). When she pulls back the white cloth, she sees two play-card figures, freely moving, broken out of the play-card’s frame. Eventually, the Queen of Hearts appears and demands them to be beheaded, which is then carried out by the white rabbit.

The growing awareness of her being in control is also evident in the trial sequence. Queen and King sit on a table with a plate of cookies and a blue exercise book. Alice is charged for having eaten cookies, which she first denies. Most of the grotesque creatures are present: the skull-headed creatures, the Frog Footman, the Hatter, the March Hare, etc. The Queen continuously interrupts the trial, demanding: “Chop off her head!” However, the King asks her to be patient and to wait until the end of the trial. He shows Alice the exercise book and demands her to read the lines prepared for her, which Alice resolutely denies. Her disobedient behaviour peaks

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42 Deleuze, _The Logic of Sense_, 234.
43 Ibid., 235.
in her deliberately eating the cookies that have been provided for evidence. As she continues to do so, the King joins in with the Queen’s call to chop off her head. The White Rabbit moves towards her with his pair of scissors. In the following sequence of transpositions, which has already been referred to, Alice asks only terrified: “Which one?”

Švankmajer’s version of the trial reads, indeed, quite different to Carroll’s original story. As Michael O’Pray points out:

Švankmajer has never claimed to adapt Carroll, rather they have been free interpretations. This is quite apparent in Alice where Švankmajer has stressed the physical strangeness and antiques of the world down the hole, but ignored the rendition of English upper class life so important in the original stories.44

While Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, according to Deleuze, counterbalances in its utopian drive the absolute regression to the oral-anal depth on the one side and the “liberation of another, glorious and neutralised surface”45 on the other, it appears that Švankmajer’s version sides more clearly with the regressive side; however, only in order to emphasise and develop the utopian potential of masochistic and symbolic aggressive imagery, intimating the neutralised surface. The trial sequence is very clear in that respect. When Alice, in Švankmajer’s version, disobediently denies the authoritative language of the father, only to adopt at the end of the film the language of the mother, this suggests that the patriarchal order has been replaced by the maternal. In Carroll’s text, Alice is taking control, too, at the end of the trial. However, Alice here chiefly disobeys the Queen by explaining how stupid it is to announce the verdict before the end of the trial. While Alice’s revolt in Carroll’s text is mainly directed at the Queen, Švankmajer’s Alice speaks up against the King.

The cruelty of the Queen of Hearts reads clearly as the cruelty of a ‘Venus in Furs’ – the despotic, erotic role assumed of the women characters in Leopold von Sacher-Masoch’s text. The sequence of superimpositions that replace Alice’s head with the heads of both creatures of depth and height emphasises that Alice’s decision-making process has not been concluded, yet. She only realises that both sides – the side of height representing language, knowledge and power and the side of depth relating to libidinal lust (oral, anal, urethral) – appear either denied or difficult to access. The introduction sequence of the film, for example, points strongly to the restricted access to knowledge / power / intellect. The reader of the story, Alice’s sister, slaps Alice on her hand, when she reaches for the book. Even more so, the White Rabbit stands for the denied access to the pleasures of height. The path down

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45 Deleuze, The Logic of Sense, 237.
the rabbit hole, for instance, leads through the drawer of a desk (before Alice finds herself in the elevator). While the White Rabbit is able to open the drawer easily, Alice experiences major difficulties, as for example, the knob is breaking off. The desk obviously represents (denied) access to knowledge. Similarly, the skulls of the White Rabbit’s entourage and the exercise book at the end of the film stand in for power and knowledge and loss of control, when denied.

As the pleasures of heights, the pleasures of depth are rendered unpleasurable / pleasurable. The bread rolls with nails, the marmalade with pins or the prospect to eat wood or drink ink, in order to be able to take control of one’s own size (depth of passions and actions) and destiny (metaphysical surface), seem duly associated with punishment, denial, and the ambiguity of / indulgence in masochistic pleasure / displeasure.

However, despite (or precisely due to) these rites of punishment, denial and disassociation, Alice appears in the end able to take control and replace the father’s order by the mother’s. In Coldness and Cruelty Deleuze differentiates the sadist’s impulse to cruelty and denial from that of the masochist. While denial and punishment take a central position in both, the masochistic denial aims neither at total negation and destruction nor at idealisation, but at aesthetic and dramatic suspension. The fetishized object, as for example the bread rolls with nails, first pursues denial, then neutralisation and finally protective idealisation. Ritualistic repetition takes a similar role. While sadism uses repetition in order to condense and compact the cruel impulse, repetition in masochism serves the aim of aesthetic and dramatic suspension and atmospheric thickening. Within masochism the world enters a state of utter denial in which any suggestion of obscenity is deferred and suspended. The experience of masochistic lust lies within the process of continuous denial and deferral: from the object to the fetish, from one aspect of the object to another, from one side of a person to another. What remains, as Deleuze describes it, is nothing but a heavily saturated atmosphere like a scent that envelops and encircles the moment of utter standstill, not to be loosened or tightened anymore by further deferral and suspension.

The role of the White Rabbit is very interesting in this respect, as his continuous lament ‘Oh dear, oh dear, I am going to be late!’ does create an ongoing atmosphere of deferral; as does the fact that Alice never quite seems to be able to reach him. The White Rabbit functions as mediator between Alice and the Queen, as representative of the maternal order. He leads Alice to the land of cards and he executes the Queen’s
cruel orders. The same holds true for the deeply ritualistic and repetitive nature of the Hatter’s and March Hare’s tea party that takes place before Alice reaches the land of cards.

However, the masochistic drive towards deferral and suspense should not lead to the hasty conclusion that the masochistic bearing of the adorned shadows is unable to transcend the world of phantasm. The masochistic and symbolic aggressive revolt against the authoritative order of the father potentially extends beyond the world of aesthetical and fictional phantasm that it creates. The point of subversion, of reversal in the masochistic world, which leads to the utopian event of rebirth, is ritualistic death (dispossession): in Alice the sequence of superimpositions, in which Alice’s head is replaced by various heads of the creatures of Wonderland. In relation to the phantasmagorical event of rebirth that readjusts the world to the maternal order, the masochist will encounter the myth and rites linked to the phantasmagorical world. The ritualistic rebirth will lead him / her out of the patriarchal into the maternal order, while symbolically aggressively subverting structural elements of the authoritative order. As Deleuze points out in Coldness and Cruelty the masochist’s relation to guilt is not directed at the father. Quite to the contrary, he / she experiences anything related to the patriarchal order as a flaw that is to be punished. ‘Guilt’ is perceived as absurd, which forms a vital part of the masochist’s triumph over the father. While the masochist derives his / her lust mainly from the denial of the patriarchal order, he / she will find in myth and rite the maternal subversion of the father’s order. By devising a contract, the patriarchal order ends and is subdued to the law of the mother.

Thus, when at the end of the film Alice threatens to behead the White Rabbit, the law of the mother has overwritten the patriarchal order, or at least we glimpse the utopian possibility of this event. Most importantly, Alice’s masochistic empowerment reaches beyond the phantasmagorical confines of her dream-state. The film is clear in this respect. The rhetorical power of mythic and ritualistic imagery should not be underestimated. In order to understand this subversive power that extends beyond the phantasm, it is worthwhile to return briefly to Ricoeur’s notion of the mimetic function and its lasting, collapsing effect between a textual inside and outside, Sobchack’s elucidations on the pre-formative power of the subject-object relation to ethics and aesthetics, and Deleuze’s concept of the event, before the paper will draw toward a preliminary conclusion.

…But, although it looked as if eccentrically self-propelled, Arcimboldo the Milanese pushed it, picking up bits of the thing as they fell off, tut-tutting at its ruination, pushing it, shoving it, occasionally picking it up bodily and carrying it. He was smeared all over with its secretions and looked forward to a good wash once it had been returned to the curious room from whence it came. There, the Doctor and his assistant will take it apart until the next time.

This thing before us, although it is not, was not and never will be alive, has been animate and will be animate again, but, at the moment, not, for now, after one final shove, it stuck stock-still, wheels halted, wound down, uttering one last, gross, mechanical sigh.

[...]

Picture 11 Giuseppe Arcimboldo, Summer, 1572
Mimesis II

Ricœur’s notion of mimesis essentially entails an intensification and enhancement of meaning structures. The mimetic reconstruction of relations of action and passion serves to enhance everyday sense relations. Ricœur, in this respect, distinguishes mimesis₁, mimesis₂, and mimesis₃. Mimesis₁ describes the cultural pre-understanding of action-relations with regard to symbols and temporal implications. Mimesis₂ comprises the moment of reconstruction and re-inscriptions. As Ricœur notes:

Mimesis at this stage signifies the production of a quasi-world of action through the activity of emplotment. Far from being an effigy or a replica of action, this emplotment is its intelligible schema (épure). It imitates in that it is intelligible.⁴⁶

The notion of intelligibility is most important in this respect as it highlights mimesis₁’s ability to integrate and mediate. Within the third layer, mimesis₃, the world of the text and the reader overlap: the text interior and exterior overlap and interact in terms of a horizon. This horizon that essentially represents an existential horizon, prolongs the event of enhancement and intensification that mimesis₂ facilitates. It is of major importance to understand the progression taking place from mimesis₁ to mimesis₃ as an interlocking process of enfoldment, which deals with the intelligibility of textual and symbolic structures. Mimesis₃ still serves the function of intelligibility of symbolic meaning as it has to be essentially understood as imitation of motivational structures. In this respect, Ricœur explains:

However, must we say that, at the stage of mimesis₃, the poem still imitates real action? Not, if real means already there and available. But yes, if real means that human action is ‘effectively’ re-figured through the fact of being configured.⁴⁷

Subversive Pleasures

The implications of Ricœur’s notion of mimesis are far reaching. It entails that the reconstruction and enhancement of action and passion relations bear an actual effect on human action in terms of an expansion; an expansion that draws on pre-understandings, is facilitated through the enhancement and intensification during poetic reconstruction, and overturned during reception. The progression from mimesis₁ to mimesis₃ entails an interlocking of symbolic instances of mediation, which provoke the impulse of reconstruction (from experience, to refiguration, to transfiguration and back to experience). Action and passion relations are subject to re-symbolisation. Thus the three-folded understanding of mimesis, articulates the general formulation of a hermeneutic circle that interfuses human existence.

Ricœur’s notion of mimesis is not only important for suggesting the consistency of reality and fiction. This consistency is essential, as it negotiates the very possibility of change. As it has been elaborated, change is in Ricœur’s three-folded notion of mimesis closely associated with intelligibility and expansion. Vivian Sobchack’s concept of interobjectivity crucially links to notions of expansion, too, as the

⁴⁷ Ibid, 30.
intimate relation of mutuality and reversibility between subject and object has the effect of broadening and enriching the subject’s relation to the world in ethical and aesthetic terms. Moreover, this intimate relationship presumes aesthetical and ethical notions. Sobchack’s concept of interobjectivity highlights the bodily, fleshly condition of being ontologically intertwined and interlaced with the world and its materiality and objectivity, a fact that practices of adornment heavily draw upon. As Sobchack explains in the introduction to her book:

Embodiment is a radically material condition of human being that necessarily entails both the body and the consciousness, objectivity and subjectivity, in an irreducible ensemble.  

The adorned body and artefact highlight this irreducibility. In addition, Ricœur’s notion of mimesis emphasises – by drawing attention to the concrete effects of symbolisation processes – the other aspect, namely the metaphysical dimension of the ‘shadow’, the sense-effects that relates back to the means of expression and language and interrelates ‘cause to cause’ in effect. Change in terms of a revolutionary potential / actualisation requires not only the bodily, fleshly and intentional side of action and passion, but also the insubstantial, abstract agency of the event. In Deleuze’s understanding both sides need to go together in order to be able to inaugurate change. Thomas Nail explicates this inherent relation of the event to metaphysical realism and its revolutionary potential in Deleuze’s work:

Without the consistency and order that the event gives to being, there is only contingency, potentially and pure multiplicity. That is, the necessity of contingency risks falling prey to the twin dangers of virtual hierarchy and political ambivalence [...]. Opposed to the mere possibility of the real, Deleuze and Badiou both develop complex logics of the event that are both diagnostic and imperative. These logics are far too complex to summarize here. In short, however, the goal of the event is to create a consistency of the real defined by immanent processes of connection that do not presuppose the product they produce [...].

Subversive pleasures share this double-edged nature of being diagnostic and imperative. In order to have an inherent relation to change it is not enough to simply bear the ontological possibility of revolution. A link has to be drawn between the event and the action / passion, a relation of effect, of event-effects and sense-effects. This is actually, what Ricœur’s notion of mimesis is implying, too. In the reconstructing, poetic function of mimesis, there is a non-representational, structuring force at work that allows and demands change by never actually severing the effect-relation to the world of action and passion (re) symbolisation processes. Drawing an impenetrable line of distinction between reality and fiction has precisely this effect and disregards the complex interplay in between metaphysical and actual forces. The metaphysical surface of the event has to be understood as bearing an effect on the world of action.

48 Sobchack, Carnal Thoughts, 4.

and passion, in a non-representational, structuring way. Restricting the possibility (or rather impossibility) of change to the world of actions and passions, reducing it to a logic of mere metamorphoses and constant ‘othering’, leads into the impasse of dogmatic realism – a risk that is implied, when denying the contingency of the real and fiction: “The purpose of the event is to actually demonstrate the existence and consequences of an event constitutive of reality and subjectivity itself.”

Thus, speaking of adorned shadows and subversive pleasures in terms of symbolic aggressive acts of dramatization, indeed, draws on the distinct realms of the insubstantial, ordering, metaphysical sense-effect and the intersubjective / interobjective world of action and passion (event-effect), facilitating sensual, aesthetic and ethical expansion and intelligibility. The adorned shadows and subversive pleasures in Švankmajer’s Alice highlight the very presupposition to change, diagnosing the present and picturing the possibility / actuality of revolutionary change. Alice’s revolt at the end of the film – her proposition that she will cut the rabbit’s head off, while having actually assumed the power and right to do so – is the direct result of her experience of oppression. Diagnostically and imperatively she is (made) aware of the symbolic structures denying her access to knowledge, the right to rule over her own body (pleasures, depth of actions and passions) and her destiny (ideas, metaphysical surface) and (enabled) to re-symbolise effectively (event-effects and sense-effects, habitually and symbolically) structures of oppression. Yet, change requires the radical disassociation of oppressive power structures, to resort in utter states of powerlessness, to open immersive and intimate ‘rites of passage’ between essential and in-essential, edible and in-edible, substantial and in-substantial effects – ritual death. Alice is victimised in the order of the father, but liberated by the law of the mother. Ritualy ‘subverting’ (re-symbolising) the very symbolic structures that oppress her, allows her gradually to take control, but in a weak, fragile sense.

**Conclusion**

Thus, how far can you go in textual analysis: is the textual inside and outside to collapse, as Ricœur’s notion of mimesis, Sobchack’s concept of interobjectivity and Deleuze’s conception of the event suggest? Does this collapse bear subversive potential? Is the analytical text to be betrayed poetically? Violently opened to masochistic pains and pleasures? Thrown passionately back onto the effaced body, endlessly working through and mixing collaged farces? Pushed in a ‘weak’ sense towards political ends? The unbearable remains the unbearable. The writer does not betray the text, the text betrays the writer. This is most important to understand in relation to the condition of powerlessness: the condition of disassociation. You draw out the intolerable in the ‘substance’, in the forces you are subdued to, that crush you with all they have, that suffocate you, that leave you no room, grind you, make you disappear.

Yet, within utter despair; you can go chasing shadows. Alice goes out hunting. She seizes, subdues, weeps and enjoys. As Humpty Dumpty rightly asserts: “look out for the verbs!” Reach up ‘high’ and dive in ‘deep’. Expand your sensibilities, indulge in libidinal pleasures, re-eroticize the body and therein take the revolutionary potential of the mythic and ritualistic rebirth seriously in that it actually effects the world of actions and passions. The revolutionary potential realises within the hermeneutic-

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50 Ibid., 218.
phenomenological act of understanding, challenging and expanding the given and the utopian horizon of one's thoughts and feelings. Franco 'Bifo' Berardi highlights the importance of the hermeneutic act of interpretation to political ends:

Poetry is the language of nonexchangeability, the return of infinite hermeneutics, and the return of the sensuous body of language. I'm talking about poetry here as an excess of language, a hidden resource which enables us to shift from one paradigm to another.51

This 'shifting' allows the non-substantial, the non-essential sense-effects to reflect on the 'state of affairs' taking place and actualising / realizing its possibilities. Dramatizing language (in tension to analytical language) leans toward the subtle dramas and destinies residing within, in between on / of the figures of thought and terms of expression employed in film texts. As Deleuze asserts in a conversation with Jeanette Colombel:

Staging means that the written text is going to be illuminated by other values, non-textual values (at least in the ordinary sense): it is indeed possible to substitute for the history of philosophy a theatre of philosophy. You say I have sought another technique, closer to collage than to theatre, for my conception of difference [Difference and Repetition]. The kind of collage technique or even the genesis of series (repetition with slight variations) which you see in Pop Art. But you also thought I wasn't entirely successful. I believe I go farther in my book on the logic of sense.52

‘Staging’ responds differently to the textual need of interpretation; it explores the textual need at different levels of bodily expansion and varying degrees of conceptual intensity. Merging poetic with analytic language answers this call, folds the line to find room to breathe, traces the dynamisms, dramas and dreams of the regressive "larval subject,"53 reckons with the destiny of the idea, but is in all this diagnostically and imperatively aware of the suffocating will of the unbearable – erotics of interpretation.

51 Ibid., 140f.
53 Ibid., 108.
Pages
Eat the page,
smear its ink,
glove its face,
feast on to its pathetic
clench.
Isn't that what you came
for?
It will do you no harm,
it answers.
stretches its legs,
fight its breath
finds no rest.
Whimsical.
Hide it in a drawer,
fail it, flatten it,
to rotten, bury it deep,
to sink, burn it neat.
With a smile.
It will call you,
whisper in your ear
make you disappear:
Are you ready?

Do you see the lichen
glow in between?
Blossoming chatoyant on
the voluminous cheek?
Adorning the unbearable
sad piece?
Curving up and down in
pure lust and shame?
Vomiting cascade over
cascade, fold after fold to
gleam?
Do you see the tiny mush-
roms for its eyes, the
delicately rug corrals for
its ears? The little carra-
geen for its beard?
Oh I desire it so much,
it's sweet colour, texture,
smell and breath. More
beauty is rare.

Eat it,
smear it,
glove it.
rip it apart.
Weak.
Make no mistake.
It feels you,
tied square.
It cheats you,
parcelled fair:
Wants you,
in letters spare.
Sweats you,
in white air.
Inhales you,
in fleshly despair.
Fails you.
Silent.

The ink runs down the yellowish hair.
Texturing the face scare.
The blood seeps through tightened air.
Licking the feet in utter despair.
Close your eyes, otherwise you will nothing!

Alice despotically says.
**Additional material**


*I am full* by the author, May 2015, the line “My head is like a flame” deliberately intends to refer to the Portugal The Man song “Head Is A Flame (Cool With It)” from the In the Mountain in the Cloud album, 2011.


Pictures 1-8, 10: Film stills from Jan Švankmajer, *Something from Alice*, 1988, 84 min.


*Pages* by the author, March 2016.


Excerpt from Angela Carter “Alice in Prague or the curious room, dedicated to Jan Švankmajer,” *American ghosts and old world wonders* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), 121-139, 65 f.

Bio: Mareike Sera studied BA (Hons.) Visual Theories and MA Film History and Criticism at University of East London with Prof. Michael O’Pray as one of her main supervisors. For both courses, she has been awarded first class degrees. Shortly, she will obtain a doctoral degree from the Humboldt University of Berlin, department of Slavonic Studies, where Ms. Sera was supervised by Prof. Peter Zajac. Her research focuses on symbolic, performative textures and how the hermeneutical approach of Paul Ricœur can be seen to broaden and enrich film-phenomenological thinking in this respect. The importance attached to sensual and tactile qualities in the films of Jan Švankmajer makes his work most valuable to hermeneutic phenomenological analysis.
The Limits of the Visible: The Politics of Contingency in the Photographic Work of Trevor Paglen

Philipp Jeandrée

Abstract

The present article explores the visual politics in the photographic work of Trevor Paglen in regard to its oscillation between visibility and invisibility. This oscillation is conceptualised as a moment of contingency, that is, as an experience of ambiguity, obscurity and risk which paradigmatically problematises the contemporary political significance of making visible. This article therefore argues that the political efficacy of photographic practices emerges from a productive uncertainty rather than investigative disclosure. Paglen’s photographs consequently constitute an aesthetic gesture towards the political limitations of visibility and the concepts of agency and publicity that are still associated with it.

The belief in the objective, enlightening and revealing capacities that were associated with traditional photojournalism of the 20th century seems no longer adequate to explore the political events and conflicts of the 21st century. This article suggests that today it is no longer the classical iconic photograph encouraging civic identification, asking for humanitarian compassion or promising investigative disclosure, but the emphatic acknowledgement of photography’s ambiguous, partial and uncertain nature that attempts most effectively to prompt reflectiveness, decision making, scepticism or even debate. The photographic icons which were so dominant in the 20th century, have been replaced by the pictorial fragments, distortions and ambiguities, the visual presentation of traces, absences and uncertainty, as the politically most relevant photographic practices of the 21st century. It is this ambiguous movement between absence and presence in the photographic image, which Walter Benjamin has called “the tiny spark of contingency”¹, that ignites the photograph’s political potency by emphasising both the allure and unreliability of the photographic truth claim. Consequently, Roland Barthes has described photography as “an uncertain art” that is “only contingency, singularity, risk, ... ”² The element of risk, so inherent to photography’s contingent nature, constitutes its greatest strength - as well as its greatest weakness. Photographs facilitate strong emotional and visceral connections to the world but our responses might be unforeseen, unmanageable or fail to materialise altogether.

Against this backdrop, I show by example of the photographic work of human geographer and photographer Trevor Paglen that it is the ‘strategic invisibility’ of his photographs that encourages sceptical engagement with the political realities of the 21st century and the vital role (in)visibility plays within it. Rather than providing revelatory information or cognitive insights, many of his pictures evoke in the viewer an indefinable sense of uneasiness and discomfort. Trevor Paglen’s blurred photographs of classified military satellites and secret military installations do not offer much information about the arcane world of secretive military operations,


mass surveillance or data gathering but they remind us that there is an invisible
world of great political impact and urgency beyond our familiar field of vision. In so
doing, Paglen’s photographs challenge our traditional concepts of a critical public
sphere and political agency under the conditions of the ‘information age’. The focus
of the present article is on the political potential of photography that arises from
the fissures between the visible and the invisible, the actual and the imaginary, the
absent and the present. The strength of the photograph as a mode of visual political
thinking is to show something that is beyond words, to draw attention to something
that cannot easily be described or grasped in a coherent or clear manner. Let us now
turn to the photographic projects by Trevor Paglen who investigates in his work
“how the political geographies that structure our everyday lives are becoming more
and more abstract, and ... how new forms of domination arise in the gap and limits
of our everyday perception.”

Revealing without enlightening

Following this agenda, Paglen directs our views to clandestine military projects that
operate hidden from the public eye. The secret places and undisclosed activities
Paglen attempts to photograph, include remote and secluded military installations
in the southwestern United States as well as classified spacecraft in Earth’s orbit.
Paglen’s photographs investigate secretive governmental and military operations
that are deliberately withdrawn from public perception and can only be made visible
with the help of optical instruments such as astrophotography and high-resolution
lenses. His photographic engagement with contingency is presented through distant
observations that show the observer secret objects and activities without actually
revealing them. The ‘disclosure’ of secrets in Paglen’s work undermines the wider
truth claims of photojournalism and the belief in its revelatory and representative
capacity. The contingent character of his photographs results from pointing at
something barely visible, whilst refusing to provide any reliable or significant
information. The viewer’s cognitive frustration regarding the photograph’s indexical
quality is partially compensated by the aesthetic appeal of their iconic appearance.
Even though Paglen’s blurred images of satellites and military installations do not
provide the viewer with any clear information about secret government operations,
they make visible a shadow world that exists in the midst of familiar surroundings.
The obscurity, indistinctness and uncertainty of his photographs show that
there is something out there that the naked eye usually cannot see. The role of
contingency in Paglen’s photographs is effective both as an experience as well as a
mode of operation. The political efficacy of his photographs does not emerge from
cognitive disclosure but from affective perturbation, that is, from revealing without
enlightening. Paglen’s blurred photographs of distant military installations or the
light trails of an orbital surveillance satellite do not provide much detail regarding
the secret activities and objects that surround us but they indicate that something
is out there; that new forms of power and violence have stealthily crept into the
fissures between the visible and the invisible.

In his “critical geography of orbital space” Trevor Paglen tries to visualise secret
military programs and satellite operations through what he calls “minoritarian

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3 Trevor Paglen, “What Greg Roberts saw: Visuality, Intelligibility, and Sovereignty - 36,000Km
207.
The term ‘minoritarian empiricism’ refers in particular to Paglen’s methodology in *The Other Night Sky*, an ongoing project that aims at tracking and photographing classified satellites and other spacecrafts in Earth orbit. [fig. 1] The blurry, almost abstract photograph stands paradigmatically for Paglen’s visual research and is described as follows: “This image depicts an array of spacecraft in geostationary orbit at 34.5 degrees east, a position over central Kenya. In the lower right of the image is a cluster of four spacecraft. The second from the left is known as PAN.” Paglen states that PAN is a classified American satellite launched from Cape Canaveral in September 2009 but it has never been officially claimed by any intelligence or military agency. There are rumours amongst space analysts that these satellites are used by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and act as a communications relay for armed CIA Predator and Reaper drones operating in Pakistan and Afghanistan. All this, however, remains speculation.

The closer we get the less we see

For his research, Paglen relies on an international network of hobby astronomers who provide relevant data regarding the trajectory, location and timing of the targeted secret objects. These astronomers, who are scattered around the world, collect data and try to detect military aircraft that are not officially acknowledged but that appear in various publicly accessible documents such as military budget reports or as flickering lights in the night sky. The tracking of secret spacecraft, such as reconnaissance, military, meteorological or eavesdropping satellites, constitutes the main field of interest for the research network of a group of amateur astronomers. Paglen provides a detailed account of the workings, equipment and strategies of these hobbyist satellite watchers in his article “What Greg Roberts saw”. It is hobby astronomers like Greg Roberts who provide Paglen with the information so essential for the preparation of his photographic work. The group of

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7 Paglen, “What Greg Roberts saw”.

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*Fig. 1: Trevor Paglen: PAN (Unknown: USA-207), 2010-11, C-Print (152 x 122 cm) © Trevor Paglen; Metro Pictures, New York; Altman Siegel, San Francisco*
amateurs Paglen collaborates with is only equipped with ordinary binoculars and telescopes but, over the years, has managed to accumulate a comprehensive amount of data that is now catalogued and shared online. Based on these information, Paglen calculates the likely time and position of the objects he wants to photograph. The political efficacy of this project results from its aesthetics as well as its methodology - both, of course, are inextricably intertwined. The photographer as heroic, creative individual is put in perspective by locating him within a broader community of hobby astronomers. The photographic project of 'looking back' at the authorities behind the secretive objects that surround us is simply too vast and complex to be organised and executed by one individual alone. In that sense the photographs of The Other Night Sky themselves have a crucial yet invisible dimension. They are the product of an international multitude8 whose combined efforts are capable of creating these pictures and of bringing them to democratic and artistic fruition. The important aspect here is not so much what can be seen on a particular photograph but that the photograph exists at all. The photograph is just as much a document of the secretive satellites as of the empirical observations, astronomical curiosity and the shared civic uneasiness of a group of people.

For the actual shoots Paglen uses high-resolution and telescope cameras with long exposure times to capture the elusive objects, which eventually appear in the photograph as bright dots, gleaming trails or light swirls against the dark night sky. For other projects, such as Limit Telephotography, Paglen uses professional telephoto lenses in order to photograph secret military installations from great distances. [fig. 2] In so doing, he pursues his interest in the black sites and white spots on the global map of contemporary military operations by looking at remote objects, vertically as well as horizontally. The pictures of military test ranges, chemical and biological proving grounds, surveillance sites, etc. are photographed from distances as far as 42 miles in order to comply with the strict military access restrictions of these areas. The pictures thus created are fuzzy and blurred, bearing more resemblance with abstract colour field painting than with conventional landscape portraits.

Having said this, Trevor Paglen's photographic work sits rather awkwardly between the categories of either landscape photography, documentary or photojournalism. The latter two categories have in common that

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they are associated with a liberal politics determined to reveal uncomfortable truths or structural injustices.9 A self-conception that roughly started in the 1930s and experienced its cultural heyday in highly circulated publications such as Life, Time Magazine or Paris Match.

In contrast, Trevor Paglen’s work, which is mainly displayed in exhibition spaces and art galleries, is perhaps better described with what Julian Stallabrass calls “fine art photojournalism”, a type of documentary photography that is better known “in the world of fine art than in the mass media”10. Julian Stallabrass has introduced this term to describe the work of Brazilian photographer Sebastião Salgado but it is equally applicable to the aesthetically appealing photographs by Trevor Paglen. The attribute of ‘fine art’ has two crucial benefits here: First, it liberates the pictures from any preconceived purpose of revelation, documentation or enlightening. Second, the artistic dimension of Paglen’s work emphasises an element of self-reflexivity that allows for broader and more abstract investigations into the relationship between vision and knowledge; an exploration that goes far beyond the immediate subject matter of individual pictures.

This difficulty to label Paglen’s work, or to put it in neat categories, further emphasises its contingent and ambiguous qualities. The aesthetic fuzziness and obscure content of Paglen’s photographs convey an experience of contingency that stimulates affective moods and cognitive associations rather than providing any self-evident information. Consequently, the paradoxic effect is that the closer we get the less we see, and the secrecy of the objects in Paglen’s photographs ultimately remains. This effect, however, is not only used to present the contradictions and contingencies of political and epistemological visibility, but is also subject to the contingencies of the technological and physical conditions that enable them. As Paglen himself emphasises, the aesthetics of his images in terms of colour, composition or angle are predetermined by the topographic and meteorological conditions he works in, leaving him little leeway regarding his choices of colour, focus or exposure.11 These conditions create unique images that differ significantly from conventional documentary photography.

The use of telescope photography folds an important material dimension into the process of photographic image-making that always reflects its own conditions of possibility and the broader discourses of publicity, disclosure and knowledge in which it is embedded. Individual observations of military activities in geo-stationary orbit contribute to a politics of appearance that renders visible the clandestine activities of governmental institutions and make something visible that usually goes (and is supposed to go) unnoticed. Jonah Weiner writes accordingly: “Paglen welcomes distortion in his images because his aim is not to expose and edify so much as to confound and unsettle. He said that his photographs are ‘useless as evidence, for the most part, but at the same time they’re a way of organizing your attention.’”12 Here

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again, the bigger picture created by critical artistic practice is not a comprehensive account of clandestine military activities but a “productive uncertainty” consisting of empirical observation, social imagination and aesthetic presentation.13

“I am interested in the limits of the visible world”

Take as an example, Paglen’s photograph *They Watch the Moon* (2010) that shows a classified military listening station deep inside the remote forests of West Virginia. [fig. 3] The station is located at the heart of a so called ‘National Radio Quiet Zone’ where no radio waves including telephone signals, wireless internet or even remote controls are permitted. The listening station is designed to capture radio waves and telemetry signals from around the world that are reflected by the moon’s surface and sent back towards Earth, a phenomenon known as ‘moonbounce’ or ‘Earth-Moon-Earth communication’.14 The photograph shows a dusky green landscape of rolling hills covered with seemingly pristine forest that features in its distant centre a cluster of tawny glowing dish aerials and parabolic antennas that appear like phosphorescent eggs in a giant nest. In its obscure luminosity and surreal surroundings the image looks more like a scene of science fiction than the site of a science facility. The ‘science fictional’ character of Paglen’s photographs partly emanates from their detachment from an obvious semiotic index and the speculative nature of their subject matter. The science fictional character could be further described by what Roger Luckhurst calls the “technological sublime”15, an overpowering feeling of inadequacy or defeat before vistas of nature “fully captured, mediated, or enframed by technology”.16 Luckhurst attributes a critical dimension to the science fictional and the technological sublime for both are accompanied by modernist sentiments of estrangement and discomfort. According to Luckhurst “the discourse of the sublime allows competing sentiments regarding technological modernity to traverse the frame of the image, allowing us not only to be overwhelmed by the delightful terrors of the sublime affect, but also to begin the work of critique.”17

13 Ibid., 60.
15 See Roger Luckhurst, “Contemporary Photography and the Technological Sublime, or, can there be a Science Fiction Photography?” *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 19, no.2 (2008): 182.
16 Ibid., 184
17 Ibid., 185
In the case of Paglen though, this work of critique is multilayered and subtle. The ‘delightful terrors’ of the deadly infrastructures shown in his photographs remain mute and their haunting presence seems beyond representation. Instead of limiting the ‘critique’ in his photographs to the investigative disclosure of secret military installations or to the revelation of the hidden technological mechanisms of contemporary Western societies, Paglen challenges our very assumptions regarding the relationship between vision and knowledge. The undeniable complicity between the technologies Paglen shows in his pictures and the ones that facilitate his own image-making, additionally subvert any ideas of a distanced critical perspective. Ultimately, the aesthetic appeal of his photographs attract and disturb us at the same time, since “the technological sublime, the sublime affect is re-doubled by uncertainty about the indexical or indeed very ontological status of what it is we are looking at.” (193) Despite the fact that we can see the geographical location of a classified military installation, the actual objects and its inner workings remain secretive and invisible. Paglen examines the limits of the visible in order to direct the viewer’s attention without providing factual information. For Paglen invisibility is not simply the result of topographic, technological and legal restrictions but just as much an aesthetic or even ethical choice in order to express political concerns and scepticism regarding the revelatory use of (journalistic) images and the suggestive relation between seeing and knowing. Paglen’s images simultaneously reveal and obfuscate the secretive practices he investigates. He writes:

In all my work, I am interested in the limits of the visible world, in the nature of evidence, and the fuzzy and contradictory relationships between vision, imaging, knowing, belief and truth. I embrace the epistemological and visual contradictions in my work and am most compelled by images that both make claims to represent, and at the same time dialectically undermine, the very claims they seem to put forth.18

The work of Trevor Paglen revolves around an engagement with the limitations of our vision, perception and knowledge addressing questions regarding what can be known and seen. Accordingly, Paglen describes his own work as “post-representational photography”,19 meaning photography that is concerned with the material presence of the picture rather than its indexical potential, emphasising that “there is no ‘it’ prior to the image.”20 Paglen deals with secretive sites and phenomena

18 Paglen, Invisible, 151.
20 Ibid, 8.
that are functionally at the political and administrative centres of contemporary Western societies, yet perceptively and spatially remain at their very peripheries. The political dimension that the pictures of these sites unfold, emerges not only from a reactivation of sedimented practices of seeing but from showing something that is not supposed to be seen, such as remote military installations, reconnaissance ground stations, classified American satellites, surveillance drones, etc. The moment of contingency in Paglen's work reveals itself in a dialectical relationship between the photographic truth claim and the simultaneous indication of its limitations. In other words, the acknowledgement of the obscurity and ambiguity of the photograph is an integral part of Paglen's distant observations. We see that there is something out there, but we do not know exactly what it is. In the series Untitled (Drones) (2010), for instance, Paglen presents pictures of seemingly empty skies that bear captures such as 'Reaper Drone' or 'Predator Drone'. Instead of any 'unmanned aerial vehicle' though, all one sees are beautiful sky panoramas that resemble in their colour palette the classic landscape paintings of a W. J. T. Turner and Nicolas Poussin or the modernist abstract colour field arrangements of Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman or Ronnie Landfield. Yet, the actual object of the photographs remains mostly invisible (apart from the occasional ghostly trace of a condensation trail) or only appears as a tiny black dot. [fig. 4]

It should be emphasised, however, that the political implications of Paglen's photographs cannot emerge from visual indeterminacy and openness alone. The Untitled (Drones) series in particular, contrasts and restricts the extreme contingency and blurriness of the photographs with the precise information of the captions. The visual contingency of the photograph can only be perceived as epistemological paradox between seeing and knowing through the enclosure of text. The capture thus deliberately limits the potentially limitless meaning of the picture. Without the capture and the information of the text, Paglen's photographs of drones would lose their political meaning and dissolve into an expression of pure aesthetic abstraction. It is therefore not the visual experience of contingency alone that creates the photograph's 'productive uncertainty' but the interplay between openness and specificity, image and text. The specific information regarding time and space of the shot stresses the intended documentary character of the photographs and provides the viewer with a cognitive framework against which the affective intensities, speculative associations or imaginary referents, activated through the process of visual perception, can be pitched. The limitations of vision and knowledge reflected in the photographic image can thus only become fully discernible through the interplay of multiple media. Furthermore, the aspects of the limitations of vision and visibility becomes prominent since even though the pictures show that there is something to be seen, they deny the onlooker any certainties regarding the exact identity or location of what we see. Jonah Weiner writes: "Paglen said that blurriness serves both an aesthetic and an 'allegorical' function. It makes his images more arresting while providing a metaphor for the difficulty of uncovering the truth in an era when so much government activity is covert."21

I would suggest however, that Paglen's pictures indicate even more. Rather than 'a metaphor for the difficulty of uncovering the truth', as Weiner writes, the fuzziness and vagueness of Paglen's photographs show that the very categories of the secret and the public have partially collapsed into each other and the difficulty of

21 Weiner, "Prying Eyes", 56f.
'uncovering' the truth is not a matter of the fact that "so much government activity is covert" but that so much information is revealed, leaked and exposed on a daily basis. What does 'uncovering the truth' mean in a context where truth claims and secrecy, concealment and revealment are inextricably intertwine where both categories coexist in a symbiotic relation in order to conjure the democratic ideal of a critical 'public sphere'? 

Publicity has become the exception to the norm of secrecy

Drawing attention to secretive governmental activities does not equal the production of socially momentous 'information' and Paglen’s photographs challenge any assumptions regarding the photographic relation between seeing and knowing. Behind the abstract beauty of their surface, Paglen’s pictures harbour a deep scepticism not only against the revealing capacity of images but of the Enlightenment principles of publicity, visibility and political agency in the so called 'information age' more generally. The understanding of photography and democracy in Paglen’s work is thus almost diametrically opposed to the rather liberal account of Hariman and Lucaites, who argue for the importance of photojournalism regarding the construction of a visual public sphere. They write: "At some point democracy is a way of seeing, and democratic self-reflection will be incomplete until ordinary citizens are able to discuss whether their habitual technologies and habits for viewing the world are helping them to sustain themselves as a public.”22 But, as Paglen powerfully demonstrates, our ‘habitual technologies and habits for viewing’ will inevitably fail us, since they always create invisibilities and blind spots that indicate the utopian character of a fully actualised, all encompassing public. For that reason, we have to look closer at the relation between the public and the secret and its conceptual implications for democratic thinking.

The relationship between publicity and secrecy in contemporary political theory has been extensively explored by Jodi Dean, who, drawing on the work of Bentham, Habermas and Koselleck, argues that “democratic politics has been formatted through a dynamic of concealment and disclosure, through the primary opposition between what is hidden and what is revealed.”23 As a result of this binary matrix, disclosure and publicity in contemporary democracy are closely linked to normative concepts such as openness, inclusivity, equality, visibility, etc. and have turned into the dominant ideology of what Dean calls “technoculture” - the interplay of entertainment and communication networks that constitute “communicative capitalism”.24 According to Dean, in communicative capitalism, the public sphere is a vital ideological promise because it “provides democratic theory with the reassuring fantasy of a unitary site and a subject of democratic governance.”25 Dean argues further that the ideal of a "unified public of everyone" displaces antagonism

24 Ibid, 1
25 Ibid, 25
Jeandrée - The Limits of the Visible

from politics. She writes: "The antagonism reappears, however, in the form of the secret. Protecting the fantasy of a unitary public, a political 'all', from its own impossibility, the secret renders as a contingent gap what is really the fact of the fundamental split, antagonism, and rapture of politics." In other words, for Dean the concept of a unified public, or even of a public sphere, is an ideological fallacy that seeks to erase the antagonism necessary for politics. The secret is thus publicity's constitutive outside that legitimises its existence, yet indicates the impossibility of a wholly accomplished public sphere. "Publicity requires the secret" but at the same time, the secret indicates the impurity of the public, that which has to be revealed in order to fully realise its normative promises of visibility, accessibility, equality, accountability, etc.

Ten years later, however, Paglen's work gives Dean's argument a new twist. When Dean characterises "the secret as the exception to the norm of publicity" (11), Paglen's photographs revert her claim by showing that in contemporary democracy publicity has become the exception to the norm of secrecy. The blurred traces of classified surveillance satellites and the abstract colour fields of secret military installations show that Paglen's visual 'disclosures' of governmental secrets no longer indicate "the fact of the fundamental split, antagonism, and rapture of politics", as Dean argues, but rather that the secret has turned into its own aesthetic appearance. Pamela Lee points out that the contemporary secret, or the open secret, is essential for our 'dream of transparency' regarding the public access to meaningful information and the free flow of knowledge. She writes: "The secret is itself an ideological contrivance; its withholding - its visible withholding - is as critical to its power as whatever content we might imagine it conceals. Thus the secret paradoxically possesses something like an appearance - an aesthetics, if you like."

The disclosure of the secret and the hidden is no longer a matter of the production of new and meaningful information that automatically exerts an act of democratic scrutiny. Rather, the disclosure of the secret often teeters on the brink of turning into an aesthetic gesture that expresses a nostalgic sentiment towards the idealised transparency, accessibility and rationality of the public. The open secret is visible in order to remain invisible. In other words, the secret has little antagonistic potential anymore, since it has fully blurred into the logic of the public by becoming an integral part of the daily noise of news alerts, information leakage and whistle-blowing. I would like to argue instead that the contingent character of Paglen's photographs derives its political power not from an investigative disclosure but from an act of visual civic engagement that addresses the limitations of the visible as well as our phantasies of public transparency, democratic scrutiny and political agency under the auspices of the 'information age'. Paglen's images are reflections of a society whose high degree of militarisation and secrecy has reached a level that seems far beyond the reach of the traditional institutional mechanisms of democratic checks

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27 Ibid, 9
28 Ibid, 16
and balances.\textsuperscript{30} The spatial distance of orbital spacecraft metaphorically points at the vast gap between governmental and public interests; it indicates a logic of militarisation and perpetual warfare that floats just as freely as the satellites that represent it - far above the public field of perception and entirely detached from the gravity of political accountability. In fact, the contemporary role of military secrecy and clandestine surveillance is closely linked to the equally invisible and powerful workings of digital capitalism where the greatest threats to political agency, social participation and democratic accountability are posed by invisible forces that reach from digital data accumulation, governmental eavesdropping, to mathematical algorithm that track and connect consumer preferences or synchronise financial transactions, to name but a few. That is not to say, however, that we should resign ourselves to the passive acceptance of our fate. The visual-aesthetic ambiguity of Paglen’s photographs is also the result of collaborative research methods, as described above, the collaboration of a network of astronomers who look carefully at what is supposed to be invisible. Thus the very act of looking back facilitates an effective conflation of political thinking and action that is more important than the disclosure of secrets.

Paglen’s photographs are critical displays of the hazy utopia of a transparent and accessible public sphere that simultaneously constitutes the basis for political participation and the scrutinising counterweight to governmental power. Image-making as a paradigmatic journalistic practice with the aim to reveal and make public is questioned by Paglen in the same way as the concept of a singular public sphere as the locus of progressive democratic action. For instance in his ongoing project \textit{The Other Night Sky}, as mentioned above, Paglen’s ‘minoritarian empiricism’ constitutes an agonistic impulse against the “inextricable link of publicity and secrecy” that represents the universal claim of an all encompassing public, as described by Dean. In this project, a small international group of satellite watchers reminds us of the power of a vigilant and watchful citizenship that claims its “right to look”. Paglen’s photographs thus represent, what Nicholas Mirzoeff would call a ‘countervisuality’, a mode of resistance against the contemporary ‘complex of visuality’, resistance against the contemporary visual aesthetic manifestation of authority.\textsuperscript{31} Thus the experience of uncertainty and contingency in Paglen’s work invites the viewer to ask questions and to see a historical moment in which invisibility has become the core feature of a significant amount of political, military and economic operations. In so doing, the pictures ponder on the citizen’s ‘right to look’ even if the outcome remains uncertain. With his photographs Paglen shows that the close look is not about the disclosure of secrets or the constitution of a universal public sphere but about the concern that the ‘information age’ with its unremitting torrents of images and information requires ever more civic vigilance and intent observation of the seemingly familiar and inconspicuous appearances of the everyday.

\textsuperscript{30} In her accompanying essay to Paglen’s photographs, Rebecca Solnit emphasises the intrinsic militarisation of US society: “War is a stain that has sunk so deeply into the fabric of our society that it is now its ordinary colouring; we now live in war as a fish lives in water. Ours is a society of war, and a society at war with itself. This is so pervasive and so accepted that it is invisible.” Rebecca Solnit, “The Visibility Wars,” \textit{Invisible: Covert Operations and Classified Landscapes} by Trevor Paglen (New York: Aperture, 2010), 9.

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Touching From A Distance: Spirit & Index

Seán Padraic Birnie

Abstract

In Camera Lucida, Roland Barthes famously describes the ‘future anterior’ tense of the photograph, the catastrophe every photograph embodies; in The Pencil of Nature, William Fox Talbot outlines the ‘natural magic’ of a medium that would fetter ‘the most transitory of things, a shadow, the proverbial emblem of all that is fleeting and momentary [...] fixed for ever in the position which it seemed destined for a single instant to occupy.’

Locating the photograph in a lineage of art production framed, since Pliny’s telling of the Corinthian Maid myth in the Natural History, by the compensation of loss, I examine the temporal convolutions of the photograph through an exploration of the photographic act and apparatus, as well as through a set of three images beginning with Barthes’ discussion of William Gardner’s portrait of Alexander Payne before his execution; through the staged suicide of Hippolyte Bayard’s Self Portrait as a Drowned Man; and finally in the spirit photographs of William Mumler. Derrida’s late formulation ‘hauntology’ joins Barthes’s future anterior in the conceptual framework this essay seeks to develop.

Through a discussion of these three images I explore the emergence of the visible image from darkness, and place the 19th Century spirit photograph, in its unification for the catastrophic and marvellous dimensions of the medium, at the centre of a photographic ontology.

The photograph is handsome, as is the boy: that is the studium. But the punctum is: he is going to die. I read at the same time: This will be and this has been; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake [...] Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe.

Roland Barthes

The phenomenon which I have now briefly mentioned appears to me to partake of the character of the marvellous... The most transitory of things, a shadow, the proverbial emblem of all that is fleeting and momentary, may be fettered by the spells of our ‘natural magic,’ and may be fixed for ever in the position which it seemed destined for a single instant to occupy.

Henry Fox Talbot

i. the absent lover

In the Natural History, the Roman historian Pliny the Elder describes the mythic origins of painting and sculpture in the trauma of romantic loss:

It was through the service of that same earth that modeling portraits from clay was first invented by Butades, a potter of Sicyon, at Corinth. He did this owing to his daughter, who was in love with a

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young man; and she, when he was going abroad, drew in outline on
the wall the shadow of his face thrown by a lamp. Her father pressed
clay on this and made a relief, which he hardened by exposure to fire
with the rest of his pottery; and it is said that this likeness
was preserved in the Shrine of
the Nymphs...3

So the work of art, in this account,
erves as a substitute for the lost
object of desire. The question of
contact with the absent lover plays a
significant part in these proceedings:
the present lover directly casts his
shadow; the Corinthian maid directly
traces his shadow; her father fashions
his sculpture directly from the trace.

We have, then, a concatenation of
intermediary layers, drawn together by
this thread of contact: the lover, firstly,
who casts the shadow; the tracing by
hand of the shadow on the wall, which
will persist in his absence; and the
fashioning of the sculpture from this
tracing – which as a three-dimensional
artwork will serve to fill the void left
behind with the hard presence of a
physical likeness, founded on this layering of absences. The sculpture, literally and
figuratively, fills the space the departed lover has vacated, and because of the role
of a kind of ramified contact in its production ensures that the artwork stands in a
different relation to its subject than obtains in other kinds of representation.

Without touching on the Corinthian maid, André Bazin, in “The Ontology of
Photography”, makes much the same point, finding a ‘mummy complex’4 at the origin
of painting and sculpture: “The religion of ancient Egypt, aimed against death, saw
survival as depending on the continued existence of the corporeal body. Thus, by
providing a defense against the passage of time it satisfied a basic psychological
need in man, for death is but the victory of time. To preserve, artificially, his bodily
appearance is to snatch it from the flow of time, to stow it away neatly, so to speak,
in the hold of life.”5 So art partakes of a disavowal of human finitude, reclaiming a
virtual image in the stead of the object itself. A few lines later; he says: “It is this
religious use, then, that lays bare the primordial function of statuary, namely, the
preservation of life by a representation of life.”6 Bazin’s account here marks a
certain shift, however, from the idea of art as consolation to a conception of art as
actually redemptive in its effects.7 Here representation itself becomes a technology

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4 André Bazin, “The Ontology of the Photographic Image,” in André Bazin, *What Is Cinema?* Vol. 1,
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid., 49.
7 Early in this essay he writes, “No one believes any longer in the ontological identity of model
and image, but all are agreed that the image helps us to remember the subject and to preserve him
from a second spiritual death.” He continues: “In spite of any objections our critical spirit may
offer, we are forced to accept as real the existence of the object reproduced, actually re-presented,
set before us, that is to say, in time and space. Photography enjoys a certain advantage in virtue of
this transference of reality from the thing to its reproduction.” But it seems that the critical spir-
of immortality, in which the gap between the virtual image and the thing itself is collapsed, ensuring the survival of the latter in the endurance of the former.

In this essay I will discuss the figuration of these ideas with reference to spirit photography, another technology of immortality; in pursuit of what Barthes, in *Camera Lucida*, calls the noeme or ontology of the photographic medium; and within the context of the late-Derridean formulation of hauntology.

### ii. hauntology: theme and process

In a 1993 colloquium at the University of California, Riverside, Derrida undertook a reading of Marx that would begin by focusing on the first proper noun of the *Communist Manifesto*: ‘A spectre is haunting Europe...’ Reading Marx via *Hamlet*, Derrida would coin the neologism ‘hauntology’, a homonym in spoken French for the word ‘ontology’. “As in *Hamlet*,” he writes in *Specters of Marx*,

...everything begins by the apparition of a specter. More precisely by the *waiting* for this apparition. The anticipation is at once impatient, anxious, and fascinated: this, the thing (“this thing”) will end up coming. The *revenant* is going to come. It won’t be long. But how long it is taking. Still more precisely, everything begins in the imminence of a re-apparition, but a reapparition of the specter as *apparition* *for the first time in the play*. The spirit of the father is going to come back and will soon say to him “I am thy Fathers Spirit” (*1, iv*), but here, at the beginning of the play, he comes back, so to speak, for the first time.⁸

*Hamlet* would prove fertile ground for such a reading of Marx: the story, as Derrida says, begins with a repetition, not with the appearance of the ghost of the prince’s father but with its reappearance; and the Denmark of the play, in a phrase Derrida takes for his epigraph, is crucially one in which “the time is out of joint” (an intriguingly spatialising turn of phrase, as if time itself has been dis-located). A certain convolution of temporality takes place: a return for the first time; it won’t be long but how long is it taking, which sounds like a line from *Waiting For Godot*; time dis-located.

Of particular pertinence to the question of hauntology, Bernardo, a sentry, reports that he “has seen nothing.” The more straightforward formulation might be that he has not seen anything, but in this phrase the nothing is conceived as a thing itself, a positive presence; a phantom of language, perhaps, of reification and the tendency of abstract nouns to thingify the (no)things they designate – or perhaps simultaneously something more and something less, something that cannot be accounted for in the everyday’s economy of objects: a gap in the play’s famously unstable reality system, a glitch in its Matrix. In a phrase I will return to in a moment, the nothing Bernardo says he has seen can be said to inhabit a zone of ontological uncertainty between Being and Nothingness.

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The Thing is still invisible, it is *nothing* visible ("I haue seene nothing") at the moment one speaks of it and in order to ask oneself if it has reappeared. It is still nothing that can be seen when one speaks of it. It is no longer anything that can be seen when Marcellus speaks of it, but it has been seen twice.9

Twice – a repetition, a recurrence, a return

The figure of the ghost, at this juncture, plays a key role in deconstruction’s close attention to the differential chains of meanings in language: nothing is ever purely itself, there is always some trace of its opposite or alterior – no single unit possesses its own meaning, which is always deferred in the circulation of linguistic relations, the context within which individual words become meaningful and without which they cannot signify.10 The spectral, then, is a kind of residue of *différance*, and indeed hauntology can be seen as a late formulation of that earlier neologism. But the significance of the spectre becomes broader than this, in the context of deconstruction’s critique of the metaphysics of presence: the hauntological here displaces the ontological – as Mark Fisher11 has put it, “Derrida’s neologism uncovers the space between being and nothingness.”12 Or as Colin Davis has argued:

> Hauntology supplants its near-homonym ontology, replacing the priority of being and presence with the figure of the ghost as that which is neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive. [The ghost is] a wholly irrecoverable intrusion in our world, which is not comprehensible within our available intellectual frameworks, but whose otherness we are responsible for preserving.13

So the ghost is an intrusion, something from outside that ventures within, and at the same time destabilises the very boundary it seems to breach, because it is ‘neither present or absent, neither alive nor dead.’

Davis notes on two occasions the relationship between the spectral as a particular theme and as a general feature of writing, in a point that will form the crux of this essay: “The attraction of hauntology for deconstructive-minded critics arises,” he says, “from the link between a theme (haunting, ghosts, the supernatural) and the processes of literature and textuality in general.”14 Later on he notes that “Ghosts are a privileged theme because they allow an insight into texts and textuality as such.”15

So the operations of language and writing can be seen to mirror the operations of the spectral, that mode of (non)being characterised by absences, traces, quasi-presences: in language this relates to the intertextual presences of other speech and other speakers, in the deferral of meanings, the endless play of *différance*, the absence of the referent, and of the utterance in the absence of an embodied voice. In this framework, ontological uncertainty becomes an operational principle because all ontological questions are suspended. I want to highlight here these particular splits – between speech and speaker – because I will return to it in part four of this

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9 Ibid., 5.
10 In this we can see something of the notorious claim “Il n’y a rien en dehors du texte.”
11 Fisher was central to the second life of hauntology (after the first spectral turn of theory in the early 1990s), particularly in the field of music criticism and its intersection with politics.
14 Ibid., 377.
15 Ibid., 378.
essay, in terms of an identical split between substance and appearance that marks the simulacrum, which in turn finds a kind of technical perfection in the homological iconicity of the photograph.

The above link between theme and process, I want to argue, can be made with regards to the relationship between spirit photography and photography as such, between the iconography of spectres and the (hau)ontology of visual representation itself; the particular species of the photograph that is the spirit photograph – in its constructedness, its uncanniness, in its contraction of temporal registers, in its combination of index as tracing and index as pointing – can cast a certain light on to the wider genus of photography, its noeme or ontology. We will see how the visual is already a spectral field in which the operational logic of the photograph aggravates the intensity of the haunting.

iii. origins & ontology

Two stories, in précis

The most familiar story of the medium locates its origins in painting, in the camera obscura’s role as an artists’ tool for the construction of Albertian perspective, incorporating it into the pictorial technology of the Renaissance. This account finds justification in Henry Fox Talbot’s own accounts of his experiments, designed to fix the image in the camera obscura and so invent a method of “photogenic drawing.” In many ways this narrative still underlies the popular understanding of the medium. But there is another story to be told about the medium, one that Barthes alludes to when he talks of locating its origins not in painting but in the theatre, a narrative that finds its own justification in Daguerre’s role in the history of the diorama: in artificial spectacle, instead of traces and impressions. In the first, the photograph is a kind of perfect document, faithful to its object, for which it is transparent; in the second, it is a fantasia, a pictorial artifact, occasioning the object it would appear to re-present, in varying degrees of translucency and opacity.

These differing accounts will pertain to the two paradigmatic conceptions of the medium I shall outline shortly.

The mummy complex

Since its invention photography has been associated with death, in various literal and figurative ways, from Delaroche’s marking its advent as the death of painting to the genres of posthumous portraiture and spirit photography. It has been likened to death masks and funeral shrouds, to processes of embalming and to the use of fetishes designed to protect against loss, on the one hand, and as something that might steal a person’s soul, killing the subject piecemeal, on the other. Ralph Waldo Emerson expressed a similar sentiment, one that would also find articulation in Camera Lucida, when he asked: “Were you ever daguerreotyped… and did you look with all vigor at the lens of the camera… [to find that] unhappily the total expression had escaped from the face and you held the portrait of a mask instead of a man?” Siegfried Kracauer likens the people in photographs to manikins, and of course doll-like likenesses are the ur-type of the Uncanny, possessors of a curious quasi-

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16 Barthes, Camera Lucida, 31.
18 A dread Balzac famously held and which Kracauer, in a different register, would also advance in ‘Photography.’
19 Quoted in Francois Brunet, Photography and Literature (London: Reaktion Books, 2009), 68.
living deadness." Elsewhere in ‘Photography,’ Kracauer claims that the prevalence of photographs is “a sign of the fear of death[...] In the illustrated magazines the world has become a photographable present, and the photographed present has been entirely eternalized. Seemingly ripped from the clutch of death, in reality it has succumbed to it." Everywhere you turn in the literature, popular, academic, or literary, we find this linkage with death; concomitant with this we find an equally enduring association with the haunted and haunting, with photographs as both agents and bearers of haunting, an association I shall draw out shortly.

This raft of associations, deeply embedded in the popular understanding of the medium, constitutes one powerful conception of photography’s nature, answering to the first, still popularly dominant story told about the origins of the medium as described above. For the purposes of this essay, I will call this photography’s temporal paradigm: it is the theoretical and affective formation that most acutely concerns itself with the past, with the passage of time and thus with mortality. It exemplifies the psychological formation Bazin termed the ‘mummy complex;’ Camera Lucida provides the starkest expression of this tendency.

It is a model that we can oppose to a tendency long latent in the medium’s history, once suppressed by the strictures of a Modernist ‘straight’ photography, but which has come to the fore in more recent decades, answering to the second account of photography founded on the diorama: for the purposes of my argument I will term this the deictic paradigm, concerning itself in the spirit of the index as pointing, as index finger, as performative gesture, as opposed to that spirit of the index taken as trace. These two components, in short, answer to the two key actions of the Peircean index, which I shall probe in the fourth part of this essay: tracing and pointing.

In certain ways this is an uneasy relationship, but it is precisely in this unstable compound of the temporal and the deictic, of emanation and indication, that the photographic hauntological can be said to reside, a point I will soon develop when I turn to a selection of particular photographs; but first I want to turn from this link between photography and death to a similarly enduring association with the marvellous.

If the relationship with death resides in the form of the index as emanation, as trace of the expired moments of the world, the relation with the marvellous grows out of its iconicity – out of miraculous resemblance, its homological identity, or seeming identity, with its depicted object.

A terrible distinctiveness

In September 1862, Matthew Brady despatched the photographer Alexander Gardner and his assistant James Gibson to document the aftermath of the battle of Antietam in Maryland, the bloodiest of the civil war, exhibiting the photographs a month later at his gallery in New York. On the 20th of October, an anonymous writer in the New York Times would describe the exhibition to the wider public:

Mr. Brady has done something to bring home to us the terrible reality and earnestness of war. If he has not brought bodies and laid them in our door-yards and along the streets, he has done something very like it [...] These pictures have a terrible distinctness. By the aid of the magnifying-glass, the very features of the slain may be distinguished. We would scarcely choose to be in the gallery, when

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21 Ibid., 59.
one of the women bending over them should recognize a husband, son, or a brother in the still, lifeless lines of bodies, that lie ready for the gaping trenches.\footnote{Anonymous, “BRADY’S PHOTOGRAPHS.; Pictures of the Dead at Antietam,” \textit{New York Times}, October 20, 1862, http://tinyurl.com/mfe5paf.}

In this passage, photography’s unparalleled descriptive power produces a ‘terrible’, now commonplace, effect: the depicted bodies might be present for the viewer; made all the more appalling in that moment of familial recognition. One sense of the adjective terrible, of course, points to awe: that which is terrifying is always also awesome. This sense of presence, founded on similitude, underpins all photography in which the content is legible: it grants sanction to documentary’s claim to truth and enables the cognitive and affective estrangement of manipulated pictures such as Chino Otsuka’s uncanny family photographs or Jerry Uelsmann’s symbolist dreams.\footnote{Edgar Allen Poe, “The Daguerreotype,” \textit{Alexander’s Weekly Messenger}, January 15, 1840, http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/PB400008_POE_ALEX-WEEKLY_1840-01-15.pdf.}

Twenty-two years prior to The Dead of Antietam exhibition in New York, Edgar Allen Poe described the process of daguerreotype development in a related way:

When taken out, the plate does not at first appear to have received a definite impression – some short processes, however, develop it in the most miraculous beauty. All language must fall short of conveying any just idea of the truth, and this will not appear so wonderful when we reflect that the source of vision itself has been, in this instance, the designer. Perhaps, if we imagine the distinctness with which an object is reflected in a positively perfect mirror, we come as near the reality as by any other means. For, in truth, the Daguerreotype plate is infinitely (we use the term advisedly) is infinitely more accurate in its representation than any painting by human hands. If we examine a work of ordinary art, by means of a powerful microscope, all traces of resemblance to nature will disappear – but the closest scrutiny of the photogenic drawing discloses on a more absolute truth, a more perfect identity of aspect with the aerial perspective are those of truth itself in the supremeness of its perfection.\footnote{Lady Elizabeth Eastlake, “Photography,” in \textit{Classic Essays On Photography}, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven, CT: Leete’s Island Books, Inc, 1980), 39. First published in the \textit{London Quarterly Review}, 1857.}

\textit{Infinite, perfect identity, miraculous beauty, truth itself in the supremeness of its perfection} – such language abounds in the early discourses around photography: Lady Elizabeth Eastlake, the English art critic and historian, would also term the medium “miraculous”,\footnote{Talbot, “Some Account,” 25.} and Henry Fox Talbot, inventor of the calotype process, would call it a “natural magic.”\footnote{Talbot, “Some Account,” 25.} If a miracle is an event that confounds the operating norms of the world, a cosmic \textit{deus ex machina} that plunges the incumbent reality-system into crisis and announces the advent of a new dispensation, then such language seems apposite, because in the photograph a very different relationship between the picture and its content obtains than in all prior pictorial modes; and for miracles, of course, all language must fall short, for the vocabulary of the Old cannot
hope to encompass the New.26 In Camera Lucida, Barthes terms this homology “concomitance”,27 a similarly theological word in its relation to the Catholic Eucharist.

The 19th Century, of course, was the age of technological wonders: telegraphy and radio, which promised the abolition of space, and photography and the gramophone, which promised a certain abolition of time – a promise that would find its fulfilment in the spirit photography of practitioners such as the Bostonian William Mumler. Jeffrey Sconce has examined the deep and ongoing relationship between these technologies and the supernatural in Haunted Media28 and it is a relation that persists to this day.29 This array of technologies, reproductive (photographs) and transmissive (telephones), share what Sconce terms ‘telepresence’, and it is this powerful sensation of contact from a distance – across space, across time, across the border between life and death itself – that lies at the heart of their uncanny, affective power. I shall examine the question of touching and its relation to the index – a peculiarly haptic kind of sign, fraught with sensuality – in the fourth part of this essay.

In the ensemble of these relationships – photography and death, photography and the marvellous – the emergence of spirit photography becomes inevitable. In that context of technological wonders, it is a small step from believing in the transmission of the human voice across vast spaces and the retention of human likenesses through time, to believing in the bridging of earthly life and the hereafter as made evident in spirit photographs and phantom sound recordings; ancient superstition and technology find a poignant marriage in such forms. In terms of the function of the artwork as outlined in the introduction to this essay, we can perceive here the shift from consolation and assuagement to recuperation: the dead lover revived.

William Mumler would eventually stand trial for defrauding the public, after spirit ‘extras’ seen in his pictures were identified as living residents of Boston. A letter from one of his customers, a certain Dr W.N. Hambleton, submitted by the defence, makes clear the relation between photographic resemblance and the miraculous:

> The countenance represented in the photograph has been recognized at sight by a number of his old acquaintances - among whom is the physician who attended my father in his last illness - as an excellent likeness of him. Thus is added another of those incontrovertible evidences that our friends can return from the ‘other shore’, bringing us the knowledge of their heavenly home and of their undying sympathy for the children of mortality.30

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26 One might draw out a connection between the miraculous and the traumatic, founded on this failure or blockage of language.

27 Barthes, Camera Lucida, 84.


29 A recent episode of Charlie Brooker’s near-future science fiction series Black Mirror involved the aggregation of social media data for the production of an uncanny, near-perfect android substitute for the protagonist’s dead husband (note, again, the romantic connection as outlined in the introduction), and Hideo Nakata’s seminal 1998 horror film Ringu involved a cursed video tape, the viewing of which would ensure your death within a week, unless you copied it and passed it on. Similarly, the Internet is awash with digital photographic evidence of supernatural ‘orbs’ and ghosts.

30 Louis Kaplan, The Strange Case of William Mumler, Spirit Photographer (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 122.
iv. emanation/indication: contact

In the previous section of this essay, I argued that photography's hauntological character resides in the unstable combination of its two forms of the indexical sign, those of trace and indicator. Before expanding on this point it will be useful to outline some of the basic features of the index in its original formation in Peirce's work.

The most straightforward part of the idea is that an index is a kind of non-iconic sign partaking in some physical connection with its signified: the smoke of a fire, the fingerprint of a thief left at the scene of a crime. The connection is direct: the fire directly produces the smoke; the thief directly touches the mantelpiece or windowsill. Contact is made. The index therefore differs from other forms of the sign such as the icon in that it does not resemble its referent, and from the symbol insofar as its relation to the referent is not a matter of arbitrary convention, as in the lexical sign.

The second part refers to what Roman Jakobson has called ‘shifters’: words, empty of semantic content, that serve a context-sensitive gestural function: look at that sunset, look at this photograph... In an essay on indexicality and medium specificity, Mary-Ann Doane explained it in this way:

> Deixis is the moment when language seems to touch ground, to adhere as closely as it can to the present reality of speech. Peirce was acutely aware of this and hence contested the traditional wisdom that dictates that a pronoun (such as “this,” “that,” “I”) is a substitute for a noun. These pronouns have a directness and immediacy that all nouns lack; they are capable of indicating things in the most straightforward way. Therefore, Peirce claims that “a noun is an imperfect substitute for a pronoun.”

To link this back to Bazin, we see here the recurrence of this peculiar relationship between representation and Thing in which the representation plays the role of a surrogate. Of course, this is an old dynamic in Western culture: Blake’s insistence on the perfection and primacy of the intensely particular, beauty in a handful of dust, foreshadows the sentiment, while Platonism reverses the relation – we might say that for Plato, the pronoun is the imperfect substitute for the abstract nouns of the Forms. But the question of the perfection or otherwise of the substitute is irrelevant to the fact of substitution. The directness and immediacy, we must note, characteristics of the index, have also long been taken, in one form or another, to characterise the photograph as a peculiar kind of picture. The promise of this immediacy is the assuagement of the Corinthian maid, the recuperation of her loss. If indexicality sometimes seems like a tenuous account of the vexed encounter with the real offered by photography, we can find the persistence of the idea in the intensity of the libidinal investments made clear in the Natural History. Due to the suasive power of its iconicity, we long for a kind of contact with the referent of the photograph, a longing it solicits and betrays. The Spirit photograph, as a particular genus of the photograph, throws this desire into the sharpest relief, makes plain the operational necessity of desire in our everyday experience of the photographic, and thereby illuminates the wider species.

The development of cameraphone photography readily includes each sense of the index: people take photographs to recall events such as gigs and weddings, and they

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also take photographs to point things out to friends and family – a snapped picture of something funny or peculiar or otherwise noteworthy, sent without explanation for its meanings will be clear within the context of that familial exchange. The first says *we were here*, the second look at this. Digital imaging has sometimes been interpreted as a marked break with ‘traditional’ photography, but these two examples highlight the continuity of digital in the functional persistence of the two forms of the index.

Pointing itself, in the second component of the index, shares a peculiar relationship to contact, because to point to something is precisely not to touch it – there is always a gap between the index finger and the object. This everyday deixis becomes strange when the pointing occurs in the absence of the object. This absence, as we shall shortly see, is what Derrida means in claiming that death is a condition of the mark: “One writes in order to communicate something to those who are absent. The absence of the sender, of the receiver [destinateur], from the mark that he abandons, and which cuts itself off from him and continues to produce effects independently of his presence and of the present actuality of his intentions [vouloir-dire], indeed even after his death, his absence, which moreover belongs to the structure of all writing...” If this enabling absence has certain peculiar ramifications for language and literature (all stories, in this formulation, become ghost stories), its ramifications for photography are stranger still, because while fiction’s object never existed and does not exist, photography’s object existed once but no longer exists. Photography, in other words, always points at something that has ceased to be, and so, by the lights of the temporal paradigm, is always saturated with the fact of this cessation.

The strangeness in this relation consists in the connection between contact and resemblance, between indexicality and the photograph’s peculiar form of homological iconicity. Resemblance might have been the principal goal of the medium’s inventors, and indexicality the chief quality that distinguishes the medium from other forms of picture-making, but a photograph that does not resemble its object through distortion is still indexical; resemblance is not therefore a simple product of indexicality. So where does the strangeness in this relation, between index and resemblance, reside?

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32 Uploaded to social media within seconds of its capture, transmitted globally with unfathomable speed, it might also say: *we are here*. This would constitute a particularly digital temporality, a genuinely novel development in the history of the medium; an index pointing neither retrospectively or prospectively, but instead pointing *here, now*, not a *that* but a *this*.

33 Most substantively by William J. Mitchell in *The Reconfigured Eye* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994). The ontological question here pertains to whether we grant the material of the technology or the practice of its usages primacy in our definition of photograph’s essence, to use that most vexed of terms. Mitchell certainly argues for the former, highlighting the way the pixel-grid shatters the tonal and pictorial continuity characteristic of the analogue image.

34 The absence central to fiction, in terms of the literary hauntological, and an absence central to the photograph, whose object is always already gone.


36 Henry Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1844), 4, http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/33447: “Such, then, was the method which I proposed to try again, and to endeavor, as before, to trace with my pencil the outlines of the scenery depicted on the paper [by the camera obscura]. And this led me to reflect on the inimitable beauty of the pictures of nature’s painting which the glass lens of the Camera throws upon the paper in its focus—fairy pictures, creations of a moment, and destined as rapidly to fade away. It was during these thoughts that the idea occurred to me...how charming it would be if it were possible to cause these natural images to imprint themselves durably, and remain fixed upon the paper!”
My answer is that it consists in the way that resemblance, in part, supplies the index with its psychic charge, its affective power, its evidentiary force: it endows the index with the spectatorial sensation of contact. I say ‘in part’ because there is a certain circularity to this relation: we might also say that the index supplies the resemblance with its peculiar power, because otherwise it is just another kind of picture.

We should note that this account of the index in its indicative mode is ensconced within the terms of the temporal paradigm. Pointing in the purely deictic sense reverses the direction of the pointing finger. In the temporal framework it points backwards: in the deictic paradigm, by contrast, it might point in some other direction altogether.

The central issue is that the promise of contact is one that the index can never fulfil, in part because pointing itself requires the absence of touch. Photography therefore is poised between these countervailing forces, between the desire for contact and the necessity that no contact be made. Herein lies the agony and allure of photographs, the Barthes of the present forever excluded from the Winter Garden, no matter how desperately he presses his face up against the glass.

Pointing at something, moreover, always entails its extraction from its context: one points something out. This marks the beginning of the photograph’s process of dematerialising abstraction, cutting the subject out from the continua of everyday bodies and objects, which may have reached its apotheosis in the digital form: unstuck from its object, prised from its substrate, converted into binary. Barthes makes this relationship between visuality and spectrality evident in the compacted roots of the Greek word *eidolon*, meaning both image and phantom, and the relation between apparition and appearance.

And the person or thing photographed is the target, the referent, a kind of little simulacrum, any eidolon emitted by the object, which I should like to call the spectrum of the Photograph, because this word retains, through its root, a relation to “spectacle” and adds to it that rather terrible thing which is there in every photograph: the return of the dead.37

Pointed out, extracted, the object becomes image, becomes spectral. It becomes something that haunts.

Futurity

In a further knot in the braiding of deixis and temporality, another feature of the kind of pointing discussed must be examined. I will underscore this now insofar as it is central to what Barthes calls the ‘future anterior’ tense of the photograph, which the final passage of this essay will examine in terms of a sequence of images beginning with the portrait of the young man addressed in Camera Lucida.

This further knot, a chink in the temporal genesis and therefore nature of the photograph, relates to the question of pointing. In blunt terms, the photograph always begins with the pointing of the camera at some object in the world – this much is obvious. What is key is that, for the final photograph, so wrapped up in the pastness of the past, the process must begin with the pointing out of something yet to be. The photographer, peering through the lens, looks at the object before the occasion of the image, and the captured image must always come afterwards. By

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37 Barthes, Camera Lucida, 9.
necessity, the photographer cannot see the moment of capture, which belongs to the
privacy of the apparatus, only the moment prior to it. As the photograph is taken the
photographer is blind, a further instance in the dialectic of visibility and invisibility,
of positive and negative, light and dark, that permeates photography – and which it
shares with the occult and its own dynamic of the hidden and revealed.

The consequences of this occlusion of process are manifold. We may sketch two in
particular as they pertain to the current discussion:

1. The frame, conceived in that private darkness, constitutes a
field in which a multiplicity of accidents might occur, because in
the moment of exposure the photographer relinquishes control to
the apparatus and to the world in its manifold recalcitrance; I will
return to the question of accidents in my discussion of Mumler’s
spirit pictures, as it will relate to the role of intentionality in
Barthes’s studium, and the absence of such in the punctum.

2. Ansel Adams’ famously uses the ugly neologism previsualisation,
which implants a certain futurity in the structure of the
photographic act: one imagines what the film will capture when
the shutter is tripped, when the negative is developed, etc. So
photographs, bound so intimately to the elapsed moments of the
world, begin by pointing at the future.

In this way, photography involves a peculiar temporal convolution, incorporating
the vanished past, the vanishing present, and that virtuality we call the future into
the unassuming unity of the simple photograph. For Derrida, death and a certain
ghostliness reside at the beginning of language, in the mark’s quality of iterability.
The mark, in this conception, is always a future-oriented thing, and always carries
with it the possibility of surviving the marker’s death as well as the death of the
recipient, which is the condition of iterability as such and therefore of language. In
this way writing severs the speech from the voice – from a classical conflation of
embodied speech with presence – in much the same way as the photograph, in its
flawless iconicity, its fidelity to nature, severs appearance from the substance that
appears.

38 I think of Madame Sosostris in The Waste Land, with her wicked pack of cards, of which one is
blank; the charlatan whose prognostications – “fear death by water” – nevertheless prove correct
in the later figure of the drowned Phoenician sailor. Tiresias, the poem’s seer, is also blind, further
extending the logic of blindness/vision and the visionary.

39 In this vein we might claim that the red light of the dark room is always also the red light of the
séance; and while one sits for a photograph, a séance, too, is also a kind of ‘sitting.’

40 The Swedish painter and filmmaker Friedrich Jurgenson placed a microphone and a tape re-
corder in his garden to record birdsong. When he played the recording back, he heard the voices
of his late father and his wife on the tape. Does not photography, indeed all recording, partake in
an identical process?

41 Which at this stage is a virtuality, much like communism, the Manifesto’s spectre that haunts
Europe: a virtual attractor, a prospective rather than retrospective haunting.

42 See “Signature, Event, Context,” in Derrida, Limited Inc, 1.

43 Another essay could examine the role of the supplement and of secondarity in terms of much
of the work that we could bracket within the deictic paradigm, such as Cindy Sherman’s elaborate
play of costume and performance or Thomas Demand’s paper and cardboard constructions, be-
cause where the temporal paradigm will always understand the photograph in its primary form
as an emanation of a past reality, as a secondary effect, the deictic will understand the captured
moment – to use a specifically temporal phrase – as a product of the occasion of the photographic
act itself, reversing the relation of dependency. With reference to Derrida’s discussion of the reap-
pearance of the ghost, we might say that the photograph in these types of work is not a recurrence
So photography requires darkness in order that its images might come to light. In this context the photograph does not capture the Thing, so much as it describes the Thing’s manner of departure: the catastrophe Barthes finds in every photograph.

v. some images

For Barthes, the portrait of Lewis Payne before his execution (fig. 2) embodies the paradox he finds at the heart of the photograph: he is dead and he is going to die. The image is an emanation of a past moment—through its adherence to the referent, it grants us a certain access to that moment. At the same time it indexes the future of that moment—the young man’s certain death. I concluded an earlier section of this essay with the claim that the photographic hauntological consists in the unstable compound of index as trace and index as indicator, in the temporal loop—I picture a Mobius strip, the present and future flat with the past—fashioned of past moment, past future and the ever-vanishing present of photographic spectatorship.

This, I think, is what Barthes calls the future anterior of the photograph. I also described Camera Lucida as the starkest expression of the temporal paradigm, a property that consists most specifically in its hauntological charge; the passage from Camera Lucida that provides this essay’s first epigraph exemplifies this quality in the present tense of the prose, which loops the loop once more: in Camera Lucida, we have the past moment, the past future and the vanishing present of photographic spectatorship all ensconced within the persistent virtual presence of prosaic voice, of the iterability of Barthes’ text. A literary haunting haunted by the spectres of photography. Remember that, for Derrida, death is the very condition of iterability, of language itself: if the little book is a work of mourning for his mother, Barthes’s own death itself is the condition of the book. Haunting is persistence, repetition, recurrence. Each reading of the but its very occasion. And in an example of that unstable compound of temporality and deixis, an element of this relation will always permeate work undertaken in the temporal mode: you might decide, for example, to set out and document your journey along the south coast of England, but what you end up with will be always also be a document of that desire to document, because the journey would not have been undertaken without that intent to photograph. For the time being, I note these cases in passing, as examples of the braiding of temporality and deixis outlined above.


book conjures Roland Barthes, that grieving ghost. The textual is a spectral field, a Twilight Zone of language, a fog in which objects are never quite brought into focus. As Davis claimed, the appeal of hauntology resides in a link between the themes of spectres and the process of texts, but the link exists prior to language, prior to the sign, in the animal mark itself. The photograph, as mark, as sign, sustains an identical logic. The visual, too, is a spectral field.

In the final part of this essay, I will turn to some further convolutions, to further loopings of the loop.

Hippolyte Bayard’s Self Portrait as a Drowned Man (fig. 3) surely counts as one of the strangest photographs ever made. Its occasion can be given in précis, for the true significance of the picture resides above the level of such detail: Bayard, the inventor of one kind of photographic process, was a rival to Daguerre, who would win all the acclaim for the medium’s invention, along with a pension from the French government, as well as his position in the history – in our first story – as inventor of the medium. We have not had time to explore the relation between the photographic sign and the lexical sign, which surely deepens photography’s hauntological dimension, but Bayard’s photograph would be of particular interest in such a connection, for the back of his picture reads:

The corpse which you see here is that of M. Bayard, inventor of the process that has just been shown to you. As far as I know this indefatigable experimenter has been occupied for about three years with his discovery. The Government which has been only too generous to Monsieur Daguerre, has said it can do nothing for Monsieur Bayard, and the poor wretch has drowned himself [...] He has been at the morgue for several days, and no-one has recognized or claimed him. Ladies and gentlemen, you’d better pass along for fear of offending your sense of smell, for as you can observe, the face and hands of the gentleman are beginning to decay.

The photograph points: look what you have done! But of course it is a fiction. The deictic-performative, so characteristic of the postmodern, resides here in the years of the medium’s origin. We have an acute braiding of the temporal and indicative. Bayard plays dead, darkening his hands and face to suggest rot. Perhaps it is the stasis of the image that forces the connection with death, which we always take to be a kind of final stasis, the image itself a kind of rigor mortis. He is dead and he is going to die, says Barthes of the handsome young man. Bayard’s picture now, for us, long after his death, loops the loop once more, in its persistent present tense: he is alive and he is pretending to be dead and he is dead and he is going to die. It is a strange catastrophe.

The next photograph provides a variation on this theme. I cannot reproduce it here; the only copy I have seen is blu-tacked to a friend’s bedroom wall. It is a young man, similarly handsome, well dressed in a good suit, his eyes shut, hands raised to his lips in a gesture of prayer. One cannot help but to read a certain humour into his expression, a youthful irreverence set against the solemnity of the pose. Of course he is smiling. But he is also dead, positioned in this way by friends for the photograph, which captures the moment it occasions, a dead man, as seemingly alive as anyone who was ever actually alive when photographed. Photographs can only go so far: the depths recess away beneath the gloss surface of the print or screen. The loop loops; it convolves.

The Uncanny always involves a peculiar stasis, a quasi-living deadness, a quasi-dead vitality, formulated most clearly in the figure of the doll – and the doll, in its limpness, resembles nothing quite so much as a dead infant. Here we find the photographic Uncanny, conceptual cousin of the hauntological: in its provision of images of the living and the dead, it collapses, within the fictive metaphysics of the image, the seeming difference between the two, creating a weird equivalency between the inhabitants of the present and the denizens of the past, and so while it grants the dead a certain imagistic vitality it also imparts a deathliness to the living, making them mute and static, petrified.

The dead young man appears alive. Is he not smiling as he prays?

In conclusion, two spirit photographs

Spiritualism served a specifically consolatory role, in the context of wars – peaking during the Civil War, then again during WWII – and high infant mortality rates. The spirit photograph, in the official account, began as an accident, William Mumler developing a plate in his Boston studio to find spirit extras in the image. The accidental is the guarantor of authenticity, of innocence, for deception requires intention; and intention, of course, is the precise character of the studium. The face of the spirit is the face of the punctum itself – an extrusion, something extra, something extraordinary.

Mumler’s spirit photographs involve two key indexical functions. They point: look – the spirit endures. And they trace: some residue of the afterlife, of Hambleton's 'other shore', distilled on the glass. The sensuality of touch, of course, has a vast array of mystical uses: the laying on of hands, the reading of palms. In this vein, the circumstances of production for Mumler’s picture include a further kind of contact: during the exposure, Mumler would often touch the camera, as if the connection were a current conducted through his body, through his hands, his fingers, and into the mute apparatus.

The loop loops: looking at these pictures now, we have the faces of the living, the faces of the dead, each long


gone, one and all, collapsed into that equivalency described above. My impression, though, is that it is the spirit extras who seem most alive: the sitters appear deathly, perhaps as the famous consequence of the long exposures of the day. In any case, the photograph reduces both sitter and extra to the status of an eidolon. We are haunted by haunted spectres. The loop loops.

One final photograph, a final convolution. In a stroke of entrepreneurial genius, Mumler expanded his market beyond Boston and its environs by seeking business from clients who could not make it to his studio. He would accept family photographs, mailed to him, which he would position on tables before his camera, tables which seem in these pictures peculiarly physical, quite sharply substantial, jutting into the frame from its sides, and then re-photograph them. These pictures, a minority of his oeuvre, condense the psychical-spectatorial truth of photography. The family pictures possess enough charge, enough presence, to generate the extras on their own. The photographic trace of the sitter is potent enough. Mumler’s photographs in this vein register the meta-photographic fact of the medium’s hauntedness, simultaneously naïve and self-reflexive, photographs about photography, whose eidos is death. They are the species that illuminate the genus, the most precise formulations of photography’s hauntological character.

And so the loop loops; so the photograph convolves.

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Activism behind the Veil of Sentimentality: The Amy Matilda Cassey Friendship Album

Elise Kammerer

Abstract

This article focuses on Amy Matilda Cassey’s friendship album, which contains entries from free black elite women and other antislavery activists in the antebellum North in the United States, incorporates many entries focused on fighting race- and gender-based oppression. This article posits that, though these contributors were able to take on a visible position in the public arena if so desired, they often veiled their activism with sentimentality, which was based on notions of black republican motherhood, so that this activism would be deemed acceptable by others.

In the early antebellum period in the Northern United States, a group of elite free black women began circulating a friendship album amongst themselves, which included poetry, watercolours, essays and other works in a scrapbook-like format. This album was shared not only amongst the contributors themselves, but also with a number of prominent white and black, male and female abolitionists of the era, who contributed to the album mostly by way of essays. Although these women had access to more public forums such as newspapers – where many regularly published essays, poetry and other articles – much of their more personal work was contributed to this semi-visible space where like-minded could share their thoughts in an environment that was sheltered from a highly critical sexist and racist environment in the North. This article focuses on the Amy Matilda Cassey friendship album, which contains entries from 1833 to 1856 focused mostly on the intricacies of fighting race- and gender-based oppression in the antebellum period. Although many of the elite black women who circulated this album were active and visible in the public sphere – be it as educators in schools, active congregants in their places of worship, antislavery activists or feminists – they still benefited from a less visible space to discuss both their activism and share their experiences of oppression.

This article argues that, though these contributors were able to take on a visible position in the public arena if so desired, they often veiled their activism with sentimentality, which was based on notions of black republican motherhood, so that that activism would be acceptable to their black male and white male and female activist peers. Although this reliance on sentimentality was crucial for a number of different social movements in which black women participated in the antebellum period, this article takes a specific look at contributors’ work in the antislavery movement, and in the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society more specifically; though this album’s contributors were indeed active in a number of movements, the antislavery movement was one in which they were all very active and Philadelphia was the centre where many of the album’s contributors were located. In the case of this article, a differentiation between abolitionism and antislavery is made. While abolitionism is, quite clearly, considered to be the social movement to abolish slavery, antislavery is understood as encompassing the wider goals antislavery societies had in addition to abolitionism, including providing the free black community with access to opportunities for moral reform, school-based education and vocational training.

Since the 1960s, research on the notion of spheres in the nineteenth century has
been focused particularly on white women and their domestic, religious, political and economic activities. In 1966, Barbara Welter’s “Cult of True Womanhood” was published,¹ and had become the standard point of departure for historians and gender scholars by the 1970s.² Welter argues that (white) women were judged by “four cardinal virtues – piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity.”³ Woman’s “proper” sphere was the home, where she was not only to be submissive and domestic, but also the religious centre of the family. Welter insists that one of the reasons why religion was so important for “True Womanhood” was that piety promoted submissiveness and – unlike activities in societies or social movements – did not challenge these four cardinal virtues.⁴ Many studies on women’s abolitionist activities have focused on how women tried to maintain their domestic virtues while becoming active in the “male” political sphere.⁵

Approaches by scholars to this straddling of the public and private have varied since the 1980s. While some sociologists have attempted to maintain a strict demarcation between the public and private,⁶ Mary Kelley, in contrast, has advocated a complete dissolution of the concept of spheres, as the concept ignores the reality of women neverhaving been restricted completely to the home.⁷ While this article acknowledges Kelley’s argument, particularly concerning the fact that women were never truly confined to the private sphere, the term “spheres” will still be used to highlight the ideals of the demarcation between public and private; though this strict separation did not exist for most women, it still represents an ideal many middle- and upper-class women of the period referred to and publicly demonstrated their supposed willingness to obtain.

The prominence of Welter’s arguments has also informed the scholarship on antebellum black women. Many historians have argued that, when black women were seen through the lens of True Womanhood, white women would have “declared [black women] not to be women at all.”⁸ There are a number of reasons that black women would have been excluded from True Womanhood, or republican

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² Mary Kelley, who advocates for the use of the term “sites” rather than “spheres,” argues that it was not just the publishing of Welter’s work in American Quarterly that contributed to the pervasiveness of Welter’s arguments on spheres, but rather the fact that the essay was republished multiple times in other journals and edited volumes. See Kelley, “Beyond the Boundaries,” Journal of the Early Republic 21 (Spring 2001) 1, 74.
³ Welter, 152.
⁴ Ibid., 153.
⁶ See, for example, Margaret R. Somers, “What’s Political or Cultural about Political Culture and the Public Sphere? Toward an Historical Sociology of Concept Formation,” Sociological Theory 13 (Jul., 1995) 2, 116.
⁷ Mary Kelley’s book, Learning to Stand and Speak, and her argument against the use of spheres in historical literature was discussed in-depth in a symposium entitled “Women and Civil Society: A Symposium” in the Spring 2008 issue (vol. 28, no. 1) of the Journal of the Early Republic.
⁸ Kelley, 75.
motherhood. For example, that black families were more likely to be of a lower socioeconomic status than their white counterparts meant that a black woman’s income was integral to the family’s financial health. Given that she had more duties than staying home and caring for the home and the family, she would not have been considered a republican mother. Further, black women were seen by many whites as being less religious, more promiscuous, more idle and less likely to live in a stable family than their white counterparts.

Despite the lack of historical evidence to support these beliefs, black women were nevertheless not seen as being “pure” and pious enough to act as republican mothers. In the last decade or so, however, there has been a move among some historians to create the analytical tool of black republican motherhood. While “black” and “republican motherhood” create an oxymoron based on republican motherhood as a lens of analysis, historians such as Erica Armstrong Dunbar and Richard Newman have been staunch in their support of the term as a way of describing upper-class, pious black women who took on caring positions in the community.9 As Richard Newman describes the black republican mother, she was one “whose domestic-sphere work, religious piety, and self-sacrificing dedication to communal uplift symbolized early African American femininity.”10

Alongside the development of the literature on spheres and gender, there has been a continuous contribution of article- and book-length studies to the literature on female antislavery over the past twenty years.11 While this body of literature continues to grow, it remains relatively homogeneous in its structure. Aside from occasional treatment in articles or book chapters, the literature largely considers multiple antislavery societies at once and rarely includes case studies on individual societies. Given that most antislavery societies, with Philadelphia’s society being an exception, either refused to admit black women as members or only permitted them to listen in on business and not take part actively in the society, the literature also focuses primarily on the experiences of white women.12 While classic works dealing with female antislavery such as the compilation Outlines of Citizenship are considered staples of the field, the discussions introduced in such works often consider abolitionism sometimes as a purveyor and sometimes a side effect of the women’s right’s movement and women’s bold entry into the public sphere. Even in more abolitionist-focused works such as Jeffrey’s Great Silent Army of Abolitionism and Abolitionists Remember, women’s public
activities seem to be more important than the abolition movement and women's contributions toward it.

It is nevertheless impossible to consider the narrative of female abolitionists without considering women's political actions and how they managed to enter the public sphere in a period when the ideal (black) republican mother was the centre of the domestic sphere. This article bases its argument on the notion that female antislavery activists based their antislavery work on a rhetoric that highlighted their “natural” qualities as females – piety, morality and motherhood – to justify fighting the sinful, degraded, family-destroying nature of slavery; these qualities supported the antislavery mission and thus permitted them entry to the public sphere for this work. Though important for white abolitionists, this reliance on sentimentality as a veil to public activism was even more important for black abolitionists, who were already seen as hypersexual, crude and not befitting republican motherhood; they needed to represent themselves as pious, caring, mother-like figures in order to gain public respect for their activism.

In order to adequately frame the argument that friendship albums gave black women the opportunity to further their activism behind this veil of sentimentality or, in the case of this study, to contribute to the antislavery movement, first a general overview of women's antislavery activity in the antebellum North will be given. Then, a discussion of the Amy Matilda Cassey album will follow, with a particular focus on how much of the research on friendship albums – including black women's albums – has been focused on the building of friendships and not the political nature of networking and creating alliances. Ultimately, the article maintains that historical research on black women's sentimentality in friendship albums cannot be divorced from the political alliances that resulted from the sharing of thoughts, opinions and emotions.

Black female abolitionists were typically very active and highly visible in the public sphere in the antebellum period. For the most part, their public activism was nurtured in the family from an early age. Sarah Mapps Douglass, one of the more frequent contributors to the album in its early years, for example, was raised in a family of activists. After attending school and most likely receiving additional private tutoring, Douglass became a teacher of black children, teaching first in a small school that was previously run by her mother and James Forten, a wealthy freeborn sailmaker whose children were active in championing abolitionism, black rights and women's rights. Sarah Douglass later took on responsibility for the girls' school at the Quaker Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia. Aside from her teaching duties, Douglass was one of the founding members of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, and took an active part in the society's fundraising and running of antislavery fairs.

One of James Forten's daughters, Margareta Forten, was another common contributor to the album in its early years and had a similar history. After receiving her own education, Forten began teaching in Sarah Douglass's school in the 1840s. In 1850, she continued her career as an educator by opening her own school which boarded its students. These women and other album contributors had a number of

things in common with each other – for one, they were all relatively well-educated for a period in which even basic literacy was a sign of privilege. They had received a mix of private school education and private tutoring, and were well-versed in foreign languages, history, geography and mathematics.14 As demonstrated by the watercolours and calligraphy found in the album, they were also well-trained in the ornamental arts, as was expected of white upper-class women of the period. Growing up as the children of some of the most outspoken antislavery activists of the early national period, these women also shared a common bond of public activism. It was not just the antislavery movement for which they were publicly active, though. The women were passionate about temperance, morality and religiosity, and many were also active in the women’s rights movement in the latter half of the nineteenth century.15

Antislavery was, for many of the contributors to the album, however, one of their main points of activism. As previously mentioned, a number of the album’s contributors, for example, were members of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, and most were involved in one female antislavery society or another, be it in Boston, New York or another Northern centre. Founded in 1833, the Philadelphia society was focused on the cooperation of black and white women not just in the fight against slavery, but also in an effort to raise the socio-economic status of free blacks in Philadelphia and, to a lesser extent, Pennsylvania.16 Rioters burned down Pennsylvania Hall in 1838, for example, a building which had been built with the intention to house meetings of groups dedicated to racial and social equality on a greater scale. Rather than run to safety, the members of the antislavery society, who were attending a meeting, purposefully walked out arm-in-arm with each other, an action which – given the fact attendees were white and black – made a strong non-verbal statement on racial equality to the rioters.17

Black member Sarah Forten, sister of Margaretta Forten and daughter of the wealthy sailmaker James Forten, had often mentioned in her letters that just because the society sought to integrate white and black abolitionists did not mean that there was a lack of racism in the society. She stated that sometimes white racism was actually a significant problem for black members in the society, but that it was important to try to continue to work with the white members, as they were constantly trying to acknowledge and work past their racism.18 Forten’s letters are important in this regard – they highlight black women’s need to, on the one hand, work with white abolitionists who shared their main goals, but on the other hand, create a space for

15 Though many women who were involved in antislavery were also active in the women’s rights movement, not all were. Some members of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, for example, only wished to take on public activism until slavery was abolished, and did not want to be active in other movements (see Mott’s “Discourse on Woman”).
and network of black women who personally understood racism and the importance of abolishing slavery in hopes of being able to overcome, or at least lessen, that racism – this is where the importance of these friendship albums comes into play.

There are only four friendship albums circulated amongst elite black women that historians believe have survived from the nineteenth century. Of these four, the Library Company of Philadelphia has purchased three – the one which belonged to Amy Matilda Cassey, and two which belonged to sisters Mary Anne and Martina Dickerson. The three albums belonging to the Library Company were purchased partially with funds from the William Penn Foundation and became part of the Library Company’s extensive Afro-Americana Collection, which consists of sources created by or related to African Americans from 1535 to 1922. The Amy Matilda Cassey album, like the two albums that belonged to the Dickerson sisters, is filled with poetry, essays and watercolours from activists prominent in the abolitionist movement. Although many, if not most, of the entries are from female members of the free black elite, there were also a number of entries made by white abolitionists, both men and women, including some of the most prominent members of the movement such as William Lloyd Garrison, founder of the antislavery newspaper, the Liberator.

Regarding the purpose of these albums, an unidentified author, writing in 1845, identified the importance of the friendship album in her entry entitled “Friend.” She wrote: “Receive this faint token of respect with care. As your kindness doth merit the same. I am gratified in being able to share, this tribute you’ll never call fame.” Here, it is clear that, though the album was designed to be a semi-private space for black women to share their feelings and convictions with each other, it was never designed to become a public document charting their activism.

As the friendship albums have not yet been accessible to scholars for a significant amount of time, the body of literature on this topic is still in its infancy. At this time, the scholar who has arguably discussed the friendship albums most in-depth has been Erica Armstrong Dunbar. Acknowledging that scholarly literature not only on the friendship albums, but on black female friendship in general, is still virtually non-existent, Dunbar has sought to add the question of race into the growing body of literature on white female friendships. She mentions that the main difference when considering black friendships and white ones is that “[t]he issues of slavery and racial discrimination did not find their way into the central discussion of those [white] women’s friendships, yet they were crucial to the lives of African American female friends.” Dunbar acknowledges at this point that, in contrast to white female friendships, documentation of black female friendships did not just include emotional support, but also reflected a political agenda. Crucial to Dunbar’s argument is that friendships among black women extended beyond merely a kinship network, and represented and nurtured political alliances which could be relied upon for activism. Additionally, however, it can be argued that the female friendships between black and white women were also politicized; while the friendship albums were an

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19 See the Library Company’s website dedicated to the three albums: <http://www.lcpalbum-project.org>. According to historian Richard Newman, who was appointed Director of the Library Company in 2013, the Afro-Americana collection is one of the most extensive collections of material concerning people of African descent. As such, the inclusion of these albums into the collection has great meaning for the Library and for historians now able to access them. The albums were also digitized by the Library Company in 2012 and are available online in their Afro-Americana Digital Collection.

20 Unknown, “Friend,” Amy Matilda Cassey Friendship Album, 42.

21 Dunbar, 124.
important space for black women to nurture these alliances, they also provided the same opportunity for black-white alliances.

Dunbar’s analysis of these friendship albums, however, focuses almost entirely on female friendships and does not discuss the political nature of the albums. Although Dunbar opens her argument by highlighting the political nature of these albums, aside from briefly mentioning the political, for the remainder of her analysis she delves into the albums as “a symbol of sentimentality and popularity for African American women in Philadelphia and across the urban North.” In this way, Dunbar has joined the majority of historians of women’s political culture in the antebellum North who have focused on the prevalence of sentimentality in women’s – and, to a lesser extent, in men’s – discourse. Notions of sentimentality were to be found in almost all corners of women’s lives – not only did sentimentality reign in discussions of the domestic sphere, but also in women’s public lives and their activism, be it in discussions about religion, temperance, education, women’s rights or abolition. Rather than focusing on the political nature of many of the entries in the albums, Dunbar instead highlights the sentimentality, love and admiration found in the poems and essays in the album. She also discusses the acknowledgement of the duties middle- and upper-class women had in the private sphere. Dunbar includes, for example, a poem entitled “Good Wives” by Mary Forten, sister of Margaretta and Sarah Forten:

Good wives to snails should be akin – / Always their houses keep within / But not to carry Fashion’s hacks, / All they are worth upon their back / Good wives like city clocks should chime / Be regular and keep in time / But not like the city clocks aloud / Be heard by all the vulgar crowd / Good Wives like echoes still should do / Speak but when they are spoken to; / But not like echoes most absurd / Have forever the last word.

In response to this source, Dunbar argues that members of the female black elite worked tirelessly to imitate the modest, respectable “Victorian lady.” Though Dunbar’s argument is not an uncommon one in the historical literature, in this case, an important part of the historical context seems to be missing. Poems such as this one did indeed serve as reminders on proper conduct for the female black elite, and that members of this elite group worked to dispel stereotypes of black women being loud and vulgar. While members of the free black elite did create their own form of a black Republican Motherhood and aimed to represent Victorian ideals that were prevalent in white, upper-class society, Dunbar represents these activists as being modest, depoliticized individuals mostly concerned with their outward appearance.

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22 Ibid., 122.
23 Mott, 493-494.
as wives and mothers, for example. Research by a number of scholars on women abolitionists, however, has argued that (black) republican motherhood was an important political tactic. Though members of the antislavery society did fulfil their duties as wives, mothers and being the religious centre of the home, they often used these roles to their advantage to take on very public work.

In regard to antislavery, for example, activists argued that, as moral cornerstones of society, the depravity of slavery needed to be stopped. They were, after all, women and were used to not having a voice in political and social matters. Accordingly, they often relied upon the marriage-as-slavery argument, that is, they argued that since they were used to not being permitted to be politically active, they were the only ones who understood the plight of slaves and therefore needed to take on the very public duties of petitioning, fundraising, and speaking to large, mixed audiences. This justification of private duties and experiences being a cause for entering the public sphere was used by black and white abolitionists alike. Nevertheless, public action required coordination and networking in places not as publicly visible. While closed society meetings were, of course, one of the ways these women achieved this networking, friendship albums provided a medium where such sentiments could be discussed without necessarily needing to be put into public action by a formal society.

For the black elite women of the period, being the moral and religious centre of the home was just as crucial to their expected roles as it was for white women in similar situations. Reliance on religion by these women, however, was not just an act that was meant to impress upon whites that they were just as capable of living morally as whites – religion itself was pervasive and crucial for a group facing widespread racism and violence despite their high socio-economic status. An unidentified author wrote a poem regarding these notions in the album entitled “Trust in Heaven!”. She wrote: “Trust in heaven! When o’er thy path / Clouds and tempests come in wrath / When thy grief oppresses thee / When obscured thy prospects be / When around thee mists are driven / Heed them not but Trust in heaven!” For many of the entries in this album discussing religion, friendship or the expected roles women needed to take on as wives and mothers, this poem is indicative of the sentimentality present in the album and reliance on the power of God. In addition to this, however, the author highlighted the difficult lives black women were usually forced to lead; regardless of the socio-cultural privileges most of the contributors to the album were born with, racism and violence against blacks was rampant in the antebellum era. Important as social activism was, the author stressed here that a reliance on and belief in God and his mercy needed to be the anchor from which activism could follow.

Some poems were even less obvious in calling its readers to action. For example, a poem selected by Sarah Mapps Douglass highlighted the need for black women to band together and take care of themselves, albeit in a very subtle way. The poem, transcribed by Douglass, began: “No marvel woman should love flowers, / They bear so much of the fanciful similitude to her own history; / They bear so much of the fanciful similitude to her own history; / Like herself repaying / With such sweet interest / All the cherishing that calls their beauty or their sweetness

26 While Dunbar does focus on black women’s activism throughout A Fragile Freedom, she largely removes activism from her section on the friendship albums.
27 Zaeske, 127.
28 Unknown, “Trust in Heaven!”, Amy Matilda Cassey Friendship Album, 36.
forth; / and like her, too - / dying beneath neglect."\(^29\) For all the emphasis on ornamental arts and items to beautify the private sphere such as flowers, there is a hint in this poem that such interests, though expected to be cultivated and expressed by elite women, were not enough – both beautiful flowers and women were left to die "beneath neglect." To avoid the neglect of "her own history," the only possibility for a woman was to become politically active to take care of herself and others.

Although most of the entries were sentimental and almost ornamental in some ways, not all entries were. In a sonnet by Ann Warren Weston, white abolitionist and sister of Maria Weston Chapman, the antislavery crusade took centre stage, and Weston implored readers to actively join in the fight against slavery in the name of God. The sonnet began: “Three million men by God created free in this America of ours are slaves; Lives dark with suffering, unremembered graves, Behold the story of their destiny. And yet not merely because such things be. Does every noble heart indignant burn?”\(^30\) Weston went on about how the “bitterer shame” was that there were eighteen million strong who did nothing to stand up to slavery, yet claimed to live in Christ. Instead, they allowed the white jailers to continue the imprisonment of slaves. She called to the readers, “This is the cause for anguish, this the shame!”\(^31\) This text is an important one in the collection. Many entries, such as the poem selected by Sarah Douglass or the one entitled “Trust in Heaven!”, hinted at an agenda of women’s rights or antislavery that nevertheless still reflected the sentimentality and artistry women of the time used these albums to showcase their talents in. But this entry was loud and unforgiving, and challenged its readers to take an honest look at themselves and their complicity in slavery. Even for abolitionists, complicity took a variety of forms, from purchasing slave-made or -produced goods, to refusing to work in the Underground Railroad because of the belief that assisting runaway slaves to escape to free lands only helped individuals and did little to attack the actual institution of slavery itself.\(^32\) Despite the political importance of this contribution to the album, it was written by a white woman.

While many of the pieces written by white men and women were more loud and political in nature, most of the contributions written by black women were political, but hidden beneath a veil of sentimentality. Despite the album being dedicated to friendship- and network-building amongst black women, the album was only semi-private not only in that it was shared with other women, but also white activists. Here, even in their own album, black women found themselves needing to rely on notions of black republican motherhood in order to provide a neutral, socially accepted backdrop for their work. Whether or not black women could contribute such bold accounts and have them be read as well-informed, carefully formed opinions is debatable, given the nature of this album and the fact it was shared amongst whites as well.

It is in these different types of entries and approaches to discussing often politically charged issues that contributors were able to create a safe space – away from the criticism found in the public sphere, typically from those opposed to antislavery and women’s activism – to share their ideas and approaches to the topics of political


\(^{31}\) *Ibid*.

activism, but also topics more personal in nature. This sharing of the album amongst themselves enabled black women to create a sense of closeness between themselves and other like-minded individuals that could be relied upon when working in the public sphere. Additionally, the wide reach of the album, which circulated across the entire North of the United States, ensured that women who may not have otherwise come into contact with each other would be able to see what activists in other cities were undertaking and build networks and relationships that could be continuously strengthened and expanded. Nevertheless, however, though the space was somewhat shielded from the public sphere and gave black women a voice that would be heard among others, there was still a difference in how political or sentimental a contribution was, depending on whether the contributor was white or black. Though there were clear attempts at black equality through the antislavery movement, it is clear here that black women’s need to demonstrate black republican motherhood more obviously than their white counterparts did shows a reflection of the racial hierarchy in greater society in this protected space, as well.

Bio: Elise Kammerer recently completed her PhD in American History at the University of Cologne, where she wrote her dissertation on free black education in the context of the antislavery movement in early national Philadelphia. Her research focuses more generally on the intersections of race, class and gender in Northern antebellum social movements.

Gaard Kets

In his 2010 valedictory lecture, historian and philosopher Frank Ankersmit made the – philosophically familiar but publicly still provocative – argument that our so beloved Western representative democracies are in fact elective aristocracies. The fact that we incessantly hold on to a deceptive conceptualisation of our governmental system is not only misleading to citizens who do not have the sovereign power that is inherently promised to them in democratic discourse, but it also leads to the wrong questions being asked and to inadequate answers to the problems that modern governments face. Failure to recognise the aristocratic character of our elected government makes us unaware of the dangers that are intrinsic to this state form, such as the tendency to degenerate into oligarchy. And this means in concreto that political power is put in the hands of the high-profile elite of politicians, political commentators, leading economists and other people of influence, while the anonymous, silent citizen can whistle for it. Treating our government as a democracy provides us with the wrong defence mechanisms to these kinds of perils.

Ankersmit’s argument shows that when we rely upon the wrong political and analytical concepts, we fight the wrong battles. In this case we neglect to struggle against oligarchic tendencies. But it also shows that democratic imaginaries are ubiquitous. Everyone is a democrat, or at least claims to be one. This latter observation is one of the points of departure in the edited volume *Futures of Democracy*. If everyone claims to be a democrat, and innumerable academic books about the merits and forms of democracy are published every year, why do scholars still write and publish about democracy in a distinctively authoritarian, monographic – that is, undemocratic – way? *Futures of Democracy* expresses the wish to change this tradition, and enforces its argument by providing the initial impetus for this change. In the book, a broad variety of academics discuss an equally broad variety of topics that are somehow related to the title of the book. And whereas in traditional edited volumes ‘to discuss’ means that all authors write their own chapter without any interaction or exchange of ideas whatsoever, in this exciting book authors respond to each other’s arguments on the spot. In the margins of the main text are comments by other authors, to which the author of the main text replies. This makes for a completely new and fresh reading (and arguably also writing) experience, that indeed proves to be a considerable respite from traditional ‘reply to my critics’-kind of ‘interactions’.

The authors have managed to produce a very lively representation of scholarly debate on democracy. The first part of the book consists of essays, as diverse in topics as they are in depth and quality. The selection of authors has been based on

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1 Frank R. Ankersmit, *De Representatieve Democratie is een Electieve Aristocratie* (Groningen: Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 2010).
2 Idem, 8: italics in original, translation is mine.
the ideal of fair representation: there are professors, assistant professors, postdocs, PhD researchers and MA students, who all had the opportunity to write about a topic of their choice, as long as it related in some way to the book’s main theme – i.e. the future(s) of democracy. All these different authors commenting on each other’s texts makes for a beautifully “embroidered robe which is spangled with every sort of flower”, as Plato metaphorically depicted the appearance of democracies. Two of the essays take up the relationship between democracy and religion – one about the congruency of Islam and democratic qualities and one about the Christian roots of democratic practices. The author of the latter, Marin Terpstra, is heavily interrogated by both a senior and a junior scholar in the margins of his text, and even resorts to the orthodox strategy of adding a ‘reply to my critics’ at the end of his essay. The other essays provide an overview of some actual topics in political philosophy: communism as a form of democratic extremism, transnational democracy, cosmopolitan and deliberative democracy and the democratic crisis in Greece.

The democratic aspirations of the editors have resulted in the situation that the authors have no common definition or conceptualisation of democracy. In his chapter on the Egyptian revolts on Tahrir square in 2011 and 2013, and on the compatibility between Islam and democracy in general, Evert van der Zweerde conceptualises democracy as a quality, defining it as follows: “Any entity (situation, procedure, regime, institution, government, practice) in which some (or all) have power over others (possibly including themselves) can be called ‘democratic’ if, or to the extent that in it, the overwhelming majority of those over whom power is exercised, have a relatively equal say in the fundamental decisions that determine the power exercised over them”. This entails going beyond the traditional focus on solely electoral aspects of perceived democratic processes, and leads to the conclusion that Egypt, even though the Tahrir uprisings resulted in military takeover, has become much more open and democratic society. Van der Zweerde’s conceptualisation of this democratic quality also appears to inform the general notion of democratic publishing that lies at the foundation of this volume: “we have created an open and interactive book, with plenty of room for argumentation and critical thought for its readers, authors, and editors.”

The most exciting part of the book consists of the dialogues that constitute the last 50 pages. Again, authors have been left at liberty to design their own procedures to interact, resulting in three very different discussions. The first debate is very lively, with three authors taking turns, and in the meantime commenting on each other in the margins, progressing towards some interesting insights in the relations between concepts such as kratos, demos, the people, and Multitude as elements of democratic thought. The second debate, about power in democracy, never really picks up pace. Although there are some well-formulated arguments towards the end, most of the discussion feels static and forced, with the authors referring to what their respective dictionaries write about the term kratein. All this is easily forgotten when the reader engages with the last dialogue on green democracy. The two authors immediately engage in a tense exchange of letters about the merits and shortcomings of ecological democracy. Does democracy increase the probability of green politics? And if not, can we ‘fix’ the preferences of citizens in a philosophically liberal way in order to

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4 Plato, *The Republic* (Baltimore: Harmondsworth, 1974), Book VII.
6 Leijssenaar, Martens and Van der Zweerde (eds.), *Futures of Democracy*, 18: italics in original.
save planet earth? In this last debate, we see the power of this ‘open and interactive’ book at work.

However, one cannot help but wonder whether the overall form of interaction in the margins – inspired by Islamic scholarly tradition – is done most justice when applied to a physical book. We live in luxurious times in which we have the disposal of far more inclusive, flexible and active media to discuss, debate and interact. The discussions that unfold in the margins of the book are a valuable addition, but could possibly have extended qualitatively and quantitatively in a sheer limitless digital environment. The book’s introduction ends with a somewhat obligatory appeal to the readers to respond to the thought-arousing contents of the book, but gives no hints as to how the reader can join the debate he or she has just witnessed. Should he or she send a letter to the editors? A digital public space in which the reader would be able to log in and interact with authors, commentators or fellow readers seems like a feasible and arguably more democratic forum to actually obey the call of the editors to participate.

This issue raises the more general question of how democratic this book really is. “Ideally, the funding of the book, the decision about its contents, the procedure of writing, the choice of authors and the interaction between the authors, the role of the reader, the book’s design, and the process as such, should somehow be democratic.”7 I do not intend to judge the overall democraticness of this book, but I do wish to consider some issues that I had expected to be discussed in a ‘democratic’ book, but that the editors do not address. For example, the editors tacitly assume that crowdfunding is a democratic way to finance the publication of books. Recent research shows that this is not necessarily true, especially since only a very specific group of people finds its way to crowdfunding projects: people with enough financial resources, who have the skills and time available to use that particular platform. Crowdfunding activity therefore appears to be biased toward outcomes that reproduce or even widen existing social inequalities.8 The point here is not that the use of crowdfunding for this project is undemocratic, unsuited or unjust, but rather that one would expect the initiators to reflect on the use of this supposedly democratic method – especially considering their fascination for the form and procedures of this project. A book like this would provide an excellent forum to discuss this issue, and its absence seems to me a missed opportunity.

The same goes for reflections on the demos of this book. The editors seem to suggest that the demos is made up of the potential readers, but they fail to address the question of how the relation between the (potential) reader and the editorial board or the book in general is supposed to take shape. Is it in any way representative, is there anything like sovereignty still in the hand of the readers? Moreover, relating the question of democratic inclusiveness to recent academic debate about open access publishing, one could argue that democratic books would be open and freely accessible to all, enlarging the demos as much as possible. Again, I am not suggesting that a book cannot be democratic if this is not the case, but my point is rather that if the aim is indeed to democratise the activity of scholarly writing about democracy, these are questions that one is expected to consider. The fact that the editors fail to

7 Leijssenaar, Martens and Van der Zweerde (eds.), Futures of Democracy, 15.
reflect on these kind of issues, or treat these issues too light-footedly, is definitely another missed opportunity. Indeed, following Ankersmit, it might even be more serious than that: we may end up overlooking the crucial questions that our societies face.

Although the term ‘democratic’ in relation to the processes and publication of this book could have been further elaborated on, the editors and authors have definitely provided a fresh and thought-provoking example of presenting scholarly thought that deserves succession. It can serve as a starting point for academic or public debate about the relation between democratic thought and the way of presenting it, providing us with the proper weapons to fight the right democratic battles. If it is not a step towards a more democratic form of publishing, it is at the very least an important step away from oligarchy.